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by S. FOWLER WRIGHT

THE WILLOWS
by ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

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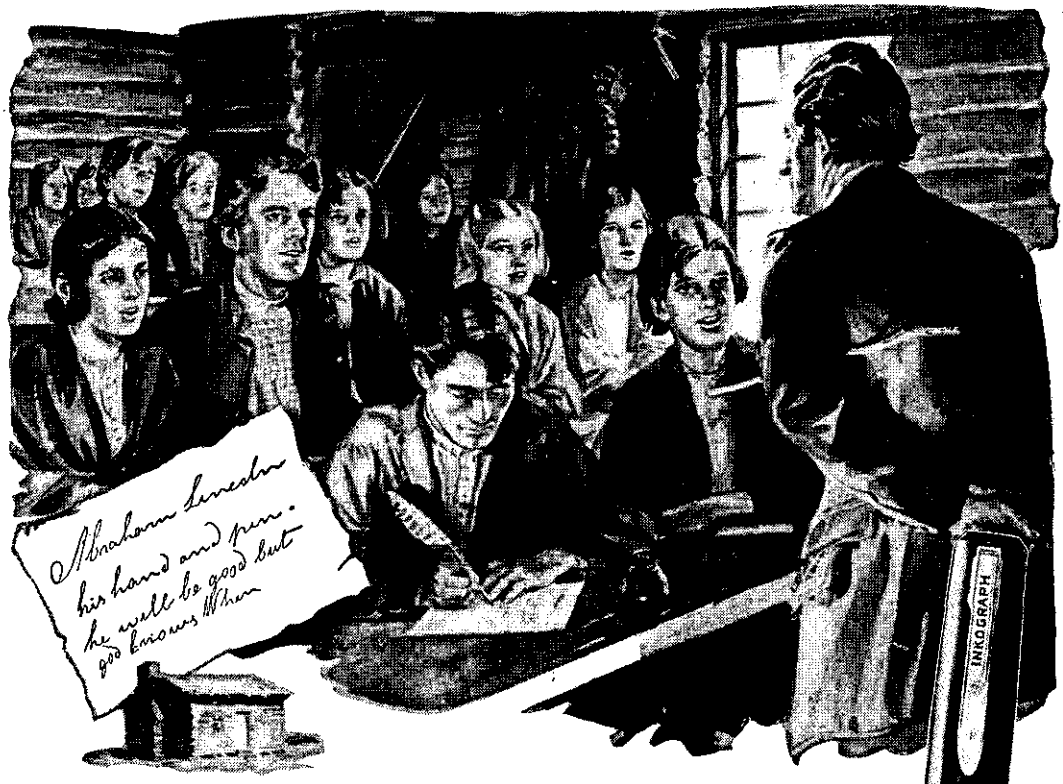

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VOL. VII APRIL, 1946 NO. 3

Book-Length Novel

The Island of Captain Sparrow — **S. Fowler Wright** — **10**

An uncharted island in a nameless sea . . . a forgotten people's war against the world . . . a man who dared to risk fantastic death for a year's lease on life and love. . . .

First N. A. Magazine Rights purchased from the author.

Novelette

The Willows — **Algernon Blackwood** — **90**

Unknowing, they strayed into a last Pagan citadel, and brought down upon themselves the soul-chilling fury of Nature's terrible, dethroned gods.

First N. A. Magazine Rights purchased from E. P. Dutton & Company.

Short Story

Roderick's Story — **E. F. Benson** — **116**

Only once in a hundred lifetimes is anyone privileged to see beyond the borderland of life—as was this strangely fear-free man. . . .

First N. A. Magazine Rights purchased from the Estate of E. F. Benson.

The Readers' Viewpoint — **6**

In the Next Issue — **87**

Cover by Lawrence. Inside illustrations by Lawrence and Ronald Clyne.

All stories in this publication are either new or have never appeared in a magazine.

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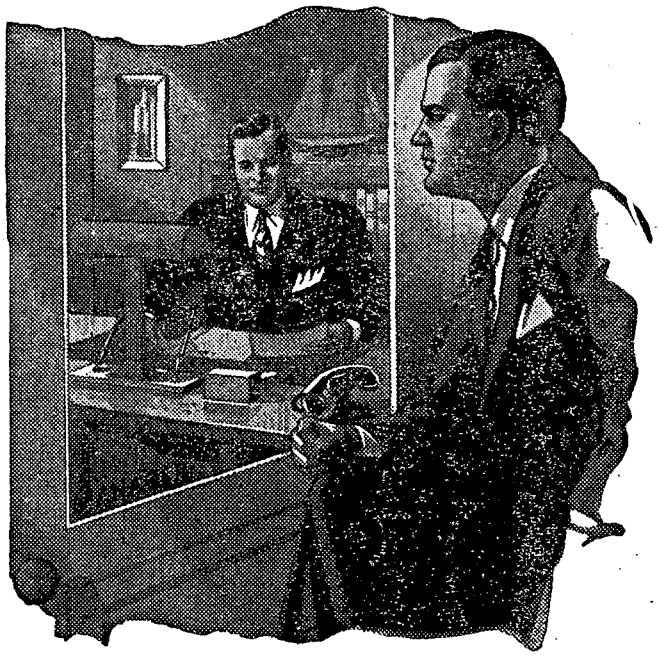
"What's he got that I haven't got?"



LOOK at the successful men you know. "What have they got" that you haven't?

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York

ABOUT HAGGARD'S ROMANCES

Dear Editor:

The publication of "The Ancient Allan" is extremely gratifying, at least to me. I have long been a reader and admirer of Haggard's work, and appreciate the opportunity to reread the novel, which unfortunately I do not possess. It still stands in my estimation as one of the foremost of his works.

Haggard's romances are, of course, like Burroughs', in that they are essentially adventure stories with a fantasy background, but there is a certain quality in the works of both of these authors (Haggard especially) which makes them refreshing to read and highly entertaining. I should certainly like to see some more of Haggard in F.F.M., preferably some of his novels dealing with She, his most fascinating character. These novels are his best-known and most easily obtainable writings, but the one which I have in mind is little known and rather rare. I refer to "Wisdom's Daughter," which is to me the best of Haggard's work and certainly his most fascinating tale about Ayesha, She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed. It has the greatest scope of any of his tales, and is set against a fabulous background of adventure and fantasy. The conflict between Isis, the timeless, and the young, impetuous Aphrodite, and the final revelation of their oneness is handled with a finesse one is surprised to find in Haggard. By all means let us have this story, if only for the dance of She with the fire-being.

The publishing of John Taine's "Before the Dawn" as the feature for the March issue is another pleasurable fact. I admire Taine's work for its meticulous method of presentation; he knows fully the importance of detail, and this quality enables him to realize more scope and sheer, moving power from a simple plot than most of the fair-haired sons of science-fiction can obtain from the destruction of a couple of dozen galaxies.

Before signing off, I would like to renew that perpetual and apparently hopeless plea for Stapledon ("Last Men in London," "First and Last Men," "Starmaker," *et al.*). Also more of Hodgson and Taine, some of M. P. Shiel, Machen, and Blackwood.

BANKS H. MEBANE.

Post Office, Box 1139,
Wilson, N. C.

QUATERMAIN FAN

I have just completed the "Ancient Allan" and I say in all truth that I believe it to be one of the finest (if not the finest) novel you have published. Only from the pen of H. Rider Haggard could have come a story so singularly adventurous and mystic. Like its characters, the story itself was clean cut and straightforward. To go with Allan Quatermain to the land of the pyramids, and Aman Ra, was to see the ancients there in all their wonderful glory. I have but one criticism and this worried me throughout the story. I was afraid that Bes would roll his eyes once too often and these optics would fall to his feet. But joking aside, Haggard's stories will be read and enjoyed for a long time to come.

Dunsany's short story rounded out a perfect issue though it was wholly unlike the others you have printed.

Now here's a bone to pick! You once stated that the remaining parts of "The King in Yellow" are not as good fantasy as "The Mask" and, "The Yellow Sign." On this I disagree. The marvelous tales "The Repairer of Reputations" and "The Demoiselle D'ys" also "The Court of the Dragon" would more than interest your readers. And why haven't you taken more from Machen's "The Three Impostors" a book worthy of much more attention?

Enclosed is one year's subscription. Need I say more?

By the way, if this note sees the light of print, I would like to thank those who wrote me, and am sorry I was not able to accommodate you all. It would be appreciated if someone who has the issues containing "The Blind Spot," "The Man Who Was Thursday," and "The Ark of Fire," would get in touch with me. Well, that's all at this end.

R. I. MARTINI.

310 W. 66 St.
Kansas City, Mo.

Editor's Note: F.F.M. has published "The Demoiselle D'Ys." We are planning to publish more stories by Machen.

CONCERNING ILLUSTRATIONS

After a hard day's work, it is always relaxing to air one's views on the most recent F.F.M. Usually, opinions are imparted to a fellow reader, but a particularly strong urge for neatness and clarity occasionally spurs one to plague the editor. So the usual resumé, and list of suggestions, follow:

Lawrence did one of his best covers for the September issue, though the painting for "The Machine Stops" contests this. His treatment of the fellow with the barbed spear and headband (Sept.) is beautiful. You're going to question my sanity at this, but if he'd eliminated that girl's head and the hour-glass the picture would be very much enhanced. Nevertheless, it is an excellent cover. Lawrence has done many good things, and I'm glad to see him working in his own medium. Though

(Continued on page 8)

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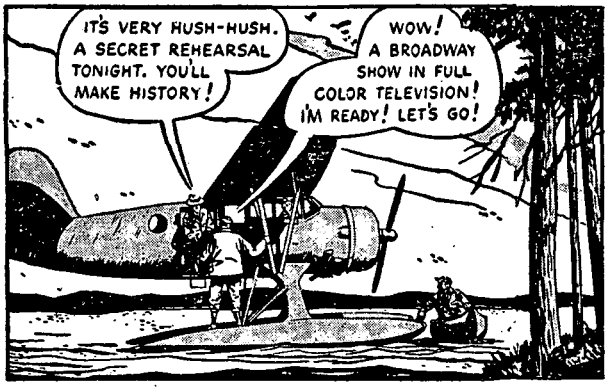
Bob Got Out Of The Woods In A Hurry When...

IF THAT BLASTED PLANE HADN'T SCARED HIM, I'D HAVE SHOT THAT MOOSE
LOOK... HE'S LANDING ON OUR LAKE. LET'S SEE WHAT'S COOKING!
BOB ALLEN, YOUNG ACTOR, RESTS FROM A LONG RUN ON BROADWAY BY HUNTING UP NORTH


IT'S VERY HUSH-HUSH. A SECRET REHEARSAL TONIGHT. YOU'LL MAKE HISTORY!
WOW! A BROADWAY SHOW IN FULL COLOR TELEVISION! I'M READY! LET'S GO!

I THINK YOU WERE MARVELOUS
JOIN US FOR A LATE SNACK, ALLEN. I'VE GOT GREAT PLANS FOR THIS SHOW... AND YOU'RE IN THEM
SEE WHAT A THIN GILLETTE SHAVE DOES FOR A MAN!

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(Continued from page 6)

I must say that the recent illustrations do not compare with his exquisite bordered pics—that was almost a trade-mark with Lawrence, you know.

The September issue's best illustration is, of course, the one on page 39. There is so much to criticize, but more to praise, so I'll only say "Bravo!" I especially like the statue in the background, and Lawrence's work on the beast. The roses are also very daintily done. The pen-and-ink on 93 is done in a style faintly reminiscent of the famed depictings for Tennyson's "Idylls of the King"—do you notice this?

Lawrence could have done splendidly with this book. My inevitable gripe is that horrible drawing on 113. How could LS do that?!! If he'd have stuck to his own technique, it wouldn't be so bad, but, as is, it doesn't by any means belong on F.F.M.'s pages.

I do hope you realize what a truly fine artist you have in Ronald Clyne, and will take advantage of your extreme good fortune in having him among your illustrators. He is now the Dunsany stories' modern Sime, so by all means keep him at those wonderful yarns. And I suggest you try him on a cover.

"Heaven Only Knows" is the tripiest piece of writing I have seen in *any* magazine, and I don't care if this Archibald *is* a slick writer (as such might be the case and I would be expected to feel very silly). 'Heaven Only Knows' why you accepted the thing.

For more of H. Rider Haggard, I suggest "Moon of Israel," "King Solomon's Mines," "Ayesha" (Clyne could do wonders with this), and "When the Earth Shook." They are all fine stories, worthy of reprinting. Some other suggestions: "Lolly Willowes" by Sylvia Warner, "Lair of the White Worm" by Bram Stoker, more-more-and-*more* Dunsany, "Carnaki the Ghost Finder" by Hodgson, and "The Moon Maid" by Burroughs.

My ideal F.F.M.? Well, trimmed edges, title Fantasy Classics, elimination of the gaudy rays around title, Clyne, Bok, and Finlay on covers (also on interiors, with a sprinkling of Cartier and St. John), Lawrence with perhaps one of his bordered pix per issue. Several hundred pages, bi-weekly issuance, and editor's page. Makes a nice dream!

Your—our magazine is really very excellent; don't let any of the fans' complaining get you down—we all love F.F.M., and are only trying to improve it with suggestions. After all, an editor wouldn't be successful if he (or she) didn't receive a deluge of all kinds of correspondence after each issue. My best wishes on *my* favorite magazine, and more power to you!

Sincerely,
CHARLES MCNUTT.

442 Deming Place,
Chicago, Ill.

Due to the change from quarterly publication we have not received the reader's letters as yet, commenting on the February issue. These will begin to appear in the next issue.

HAGGARD BOOKS HARD TO GET

Last spring you published a letter from me, in which I offered two or three old *Argosy-All Story* classics to anyone interested. As one of them was "Ship of Ishtar," I was almost flooded by replies; in fact, I got another one just last week, over six months from the time my letter was published. I was almost sorry I had written in about them; it seemed a shame to have to disappoint so many people. I tried to answer all inquiries, but am afraid there were so many I missed some. Of course the stories I had were soon snapped up—I got several stories I wanted very much from some of them. Including "The Ancient Allan," which you have given us in the December issue.

I liked these stories so well that I got several more of Haggard's, but the more I get, the more of them I want. Which is why I am writing this letter—do any of your readers have any of Haggard's romances to dispose of? I have the following: "She," "The Ancient Allan," "Allan and the Ice Gods," "The Brethren," "Allan Quatermain," "Moon of Israel," "Spirit of Bombatse," "The Swallow," "Nada the Lily," "Lysbeth," "Daughter of Montezuma," "Eric Brighteyes," "Pearl Maiden," "Wizard," "Cleopatra," "Child of Storm," "Heart of the World," "Elissa," and "Black Heart & White Heart." All of them seem to be out of print, and second-hand shops do not have many by this author, either.

I liked "Phra" very much too, as everyone else seemed to do. I wholly agree with Bob Norton about the type of story I'd like to see. "The Boats" was good too, and interesting, but somehow I can't seem to care as much for the horror type of fantasy as for the period or adventure type.

I'm still hoping for those unfinished Merritt stories some day, when and if somebody can be found to finish them in a fairly Merritt-like manner.

But whether they get finished or not, me for F.F.M.!

MRS. C. W. VALLETTE.

Declo,
Idaho.

CALLING KEWANEE READERS

I have been reading your magazine for several years; making acquaintance via the issue of "Snake Mother." Since then I have had a great deal of pleasure from some of the issues. Of the more recent ones the best are "The Boats" and "Ancient Allan."

I would like to see more shorts, and some poetry again.

There are several books I have read that should be useable under your present policy that I would like to suggest. First—"The Undying Monster," the author, I have forgotten. A recent motion picture adopted from the book entirely failed to do it justice. Then there are several of the books of Marie Corelli, especially "Ardath" and the "Sorrows of Satan." For a fine example of fantasy may I suggest, "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath" by Love-

(Continued on page 89)

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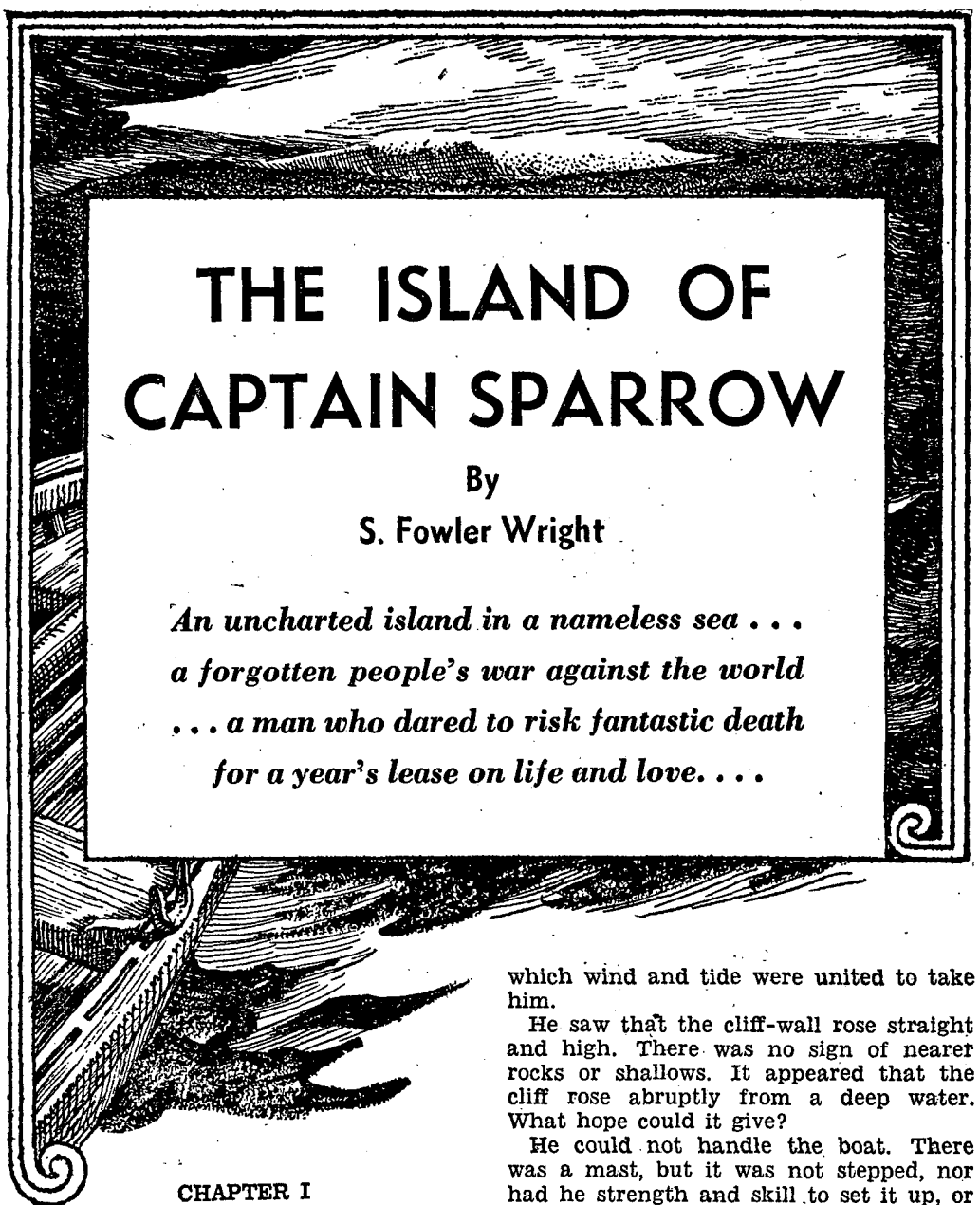

THE ISLAND OF CAPTAIN SPARROW

By

S. Fowler Wright

An uncharted island in a nameless sea . . . a forgotten people's war against the world . . . a man who dared to risk fantastic death for a year's lease on life and love. . . .

CHAPTER I

THE LANDING OF CHARLTON FOYLE

THE wind had fallen, but the sky was still black with low and hurrying cloud, and the sea rolled heavily.

Charlton Foyle sat in the stern of the boat, and steered with an oar. He was striving to keep her head before the wind, and gazing anxiously at the land, toward which wind and tide were united to take him.

He saw that the cliff-wall rose straight and high. There was no sign of nearer rocks or shallows. It appeared that the cliff rose abruptly from a deep water. What hope could it give?

He could not handle the boat. There was a mast, but it was not stepped, nor had he strength and skill to set it up, or to control its canvas. There were oars, but they were too heavy, and the boat too large for a single man to manage more than one.

Till the storm came in the night he had let the boat drift as it would. He had water; he had food. He had not known where he was, nor in which direction land might be nearest. His only hope was to be picked up by a passing ship.

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For many days the sun shone; and the seas were kind. The indolent, laughing waters had rocked him gently, and in their arms he had regained something of the health which he had sought vainly over half the world. He had begun to care for life, when life seemed most likely to elude him. He was aware that he watched the horizons for lift of sail, or trail of smoke, with a keener vigilance than he had done in the weariness of the first days. But it was still with a mind too indifferent to the future for anxiety to disturb it, unless it were aroused by a danger which should be acute and imminent.

He had leaned lazily over the tossing side of the boat, watching strange life in deep water, or gazed at a sky of white-and-blue, or brilliant with tropic stars.

Once a flock of birds passed, low and swift, over the waves. He did not know their kind. They flew straight and fast, as having a clear goal and a common purpose. Should he make some effort to direct the boat in the same way? Even could he do it, he had doubted its wisdom. He knew nothing of how far such birds may travel. They might be on their way to a near land, or they might be leaving the near land behind them. They passed quickly, and the great loneliness of sky and water was again around him.

Once the wide expanse of solitary sky was specked by a great bird that grew in size as it came more nearly overhead. He realized that it was not merely flying over, but was descending toward him. It was gray in color, larger than a swan, and with broad wings that moved with an occasional powerful stroke. It came low. It circled the boat twice in a narrowing spiral. He saw a long hooked beak, and a dark eye that considered him. He reached for a boat-hook, and was aware that his hand shook as he did so.

Then it came with a rush, close over him. He crouched in the well of the boat, and thrust blindly as it passed.

Because he crouched as he did, the beak missed him. For a second he was under a canopy of feathered wings. The boat-hook caught, and came clear.

He saw the great bird soaring back into the sky. There was a stain of blood on the end of the hook, and some gray feathers floated on the wind, and settled down on the water.

WHEN the wind had risen, he had got out the oar, and striven to keep the boat's head so that she should not be swamped by the waves. He did not know whether his toil had been needless. The boat was large, strongly built, and half-decked. He supposed that the storm had not been a bad one. Certainly not as bad as some he had witnessed from a liner's deck. But the waves had seemed large—there was a difference in the point of view.

Anyway, the wind had fallen again. The black menace of the night, with its heaving waters that came out of the darkness, was over, and he was safe, though wearied—and now the sea was carrying him swiftly toward a peril which he had no means of avoiding, or any hope to overcome. Every moment the cliff-wall showed nearer and higher, as the tide swept the boat forward.

At the rate at which it was moving, it obeyed the steering-oar very readily. He could deflect its course, but he doubted whether this would avail him. It might enable him to delay the final impact, or to strike the land somewhat further north than would otherwise be the case, but it seemed that, soon or late, he must be dashed against a cliff-wall that showed neither beach nor break so far as his eyes could follow it.

Still, the impulse is instinctive to delay a danger which we can see no means of defeating. The swimmer will remain afloat while his strength lasts, though he may have no hope of rescue. The embarrassed tradesman will strive to renew a bill, though, as he well knows, the later date will give no better prospect of solvency. He leaned on the oar till the boat lay almost broadside to an advancing wave. It rolled in the trough, and some water slopped over the gunwale.

Easing it somewhat, he looked shoreward again as the next wave lifted. The morning sun, which was behind him, and still low in the sky, found a break in the flying cloud, and lighted the cliff-face with a fading glory. But he noticed that there was one spot which remained dark. It was not a break in the wall. It was like a cave-mouth at the tide-level. It gave a hope, though a faint one.

He bent his mind to the task of steering toward it.

As he approached the cliff, he saw that the distant view had not enlarged its terrors. It rose straight as a wall. If his boat were beaten against it by the breaking waves, he knew that disaster must be instant and irretrievable.

It seemed, as he neared it, that the pace of the boat was somewhat less, and that

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his control upon it increased. He wondered whether he might not be wiser to struggle to avoid the peril entirely. Soon or late, changes of wind and tide would be sure to aid him. But the chance was doubtful. His control of the boat, at the best, was not great. If he should work it some distance from the land, the next tide might fling it back, and there might then be no possibility of refuge.

Now, the opening which he had sought was before him, widening in appearance as he approached, and of such height that a fishing-smack could have run in with its sails set.

He was aided, more than he knew, by the fact that the tide was full, and near the turn; and, more by the tide's caprice than his own skill, he steered to the opening.

The waves that broke on the cliff-wall to right and left made a swirling turmoil of the gap which gave them passage. They rolled the boat till he thought that it would be overset, swept it broadside on, and carried it into a tunnel where it bumped heavily against a wall of rock, recoiled, and the next moment was in somewhat quieter water.

He perceived that the tunnel, though straight in itself, was driven into the cliff obliquely from the sea-line. The cliff faced the east. The tunnel ran north-west. The direct force of the waves did not therefore swing in; yet the boat tossed from side to side, and though he struggled hard with the oar, it got some rough bumps as the waves hurried it inward.

As his eyes became used to the gloom, he saw that the passage ended in a blank wall, against which the water rose and fell restlessly, making a murmurous sound which filled the tunnel. The speed of the boat slackened as he approached it. He shipped the oar and took up the boathook, thinking to fend the boat from the wall of rock which he was nearing. He saw no hope but to remain there and protect the boat as best he might, till the tide should carry him again to the open sea. Then he noticed a heavy iron ring, set in the face of the rock, by which a boat might be moored.

He looked round with an increased wonder and a keener scrutiny. He saw that there were similar rings in the walls on either side. The tunnel had steadily narrowed as it progressed, so that the walls were much nearer than they had been at the entrance. It was evident that a boat moored to the three rings would be secure from being beaten against the rocks. He had abundance of stout cable, and he resolved to fasten it in this manner. He could at least feel that he would not be hurried out to the open sea till he was ready for the adventure.

COMMENCING to carry out this plan, which was not easy for one man only in the unquiet boat, he had to consider the length of free cable which he should allow. If it were much, the boat would not be centrally held; if little, how would it fare when the tide fell? And it could not fall with it, unless the cables broke. He pictured one breaking, while the others held, and the boat tipped up and its precious cargo scattered into the water.

It was true that he could watch, and pay out or shorten the cables as the need changed, but that could scarcely have been the intention of those who provided this means of security. He was led to wonder how deep might be the water beneath him. He sounded with the boat-hook, and struck rock at about four feet from the surface.

Reassured, he continued his work. If the tide, as he rightly supposed, were full, then his fears were groundless. Even while he worked, he knew that this was so, and that the boat was pulling outward on the ropes that held it.

Also, as he worked, he observed another thing with a fresh wonder. In the inner corner a flight of steps rose in the rock. They were very roughly cut, mere holes for the toes to enter. At intervals at either side, staples were fixed for the climber's hands to grip. The ladder—if it could be held worthy of such a name—ended in a black hole in a corner of the rock-roof.

Surely, he thought, if human hands had hollowed that great tunnel, they would have given it a less perilous exit. But the hands might not be the same—or they might not have intended that the ascent should be easy.

He considered whether he should attempt to explore it. He did not know what hostility he might arouse. He knew that the cargo which his boat contained would excite the cupidity of all but the most ignorant savages, and from such as they he might encounter a different danger. He believed that he was off the tracks of sea-traffic, or of charted land, and he knew that the lonelier islands of the vast Pacific were the last homes of cannibalism, and of savagery which appeared to be unable to understand any argument but that of extermination.

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He realized that, should he climb those steps, his return could not be rapid, at whatever urgency. He realized also that, as the tide fell and his boat grounded, he would be trapped beyond the possibility of flight, should he continue to occupy the tunnel.

On the other hand, the sea offered a precarious hospitality. The steps that fronted him were the only possible alternative. Though it was true that his boat would become immobile as the water fell, it was equally so that no other boat could enter upon him at such a period.

The fact that there was provision for mooring a boat, and that it was vacant, suggested either that the tunnel was unused, or that those who occupied it were absent upon the sea.

He decided to wait till the tide fell, and, if nothing had then happened, he would climb the steps in the assurance that no one could approach the boat in his absence, or attack him in the rear of his exploration.

Meanwhile he was well armed, and none could come upon him hurriedly by such a descent. If a boat should enter while still the water allowed it, he would be trapped indeed, but that risk must be taken, and already it was almost over. There was a repeating rifle in the boat, and this he found and laid near to his hand while he manipulated the mooring ropes so that the boat was drawn close to the steps, and the hollow to which they led was directly above him. He looked up, but he could see nothing. The hole was square and black.

So he sat there, watching the tossing sunlit water at the cave-mouth, and the black vacancy above him, the rifle across his knee. After a time the boat grounded, gently enough, and the water receded from it. He looked to see the whole passage draining equally, but the waves still swept in. He perceived that the floor, which was now bare around him, sloped downward toward the entrance.

As the water receded, he left the boat, and followed it, not being minded to pursue his first intention until he were satisfied that entrance from seaward would be difficult or impossible. He thought also that, if he could look outward from the tunnel, he could observe whether there was any sign of human life on the waters.

He found leisure as he waited to wonder that the floor of the tunnel was bare and black as the waves left it. He would have thought that such a cave would be a trap for sand and shell, and all the ocean's débris. But he supposed that the smooth slope caused it to be washed clear as the tide receded.

Having no haste, he did not attempt to wade ahead of the tide's retreat. It was fortunate leisure, as he had realized before he stood, at a later hour, looking over an ocean which sparkled to a tropic sun and showed no sail. For the gentle slope had ended abruptly half-way down the passage, leaving only a narrow ledge of rock to follow on the left hand, apart from which the rock fell across the whole width to a depth he could not tell, for when the tide had fallen a dozen feet below, it had not found its limit.

But he was satisfied to see that, by this time, there was no way of gaining access from the empty seas except it were by the climbing of twelve feet of wall-like rock, against which the waves beat continually.

There were not even any steps such as those which he had resolved to attempt. He judged that they who made or used this tunnel, whether it were yesterday or a thousand years ago—and it might be either, for any means he had of deciding—did not intend that it should be entered, except at high tide, and that it was very certain that no one was now likely to attempt it.

He walked back confident that his rear was secure, and resolved to explore the mystery to which the steps led upward.

IT WAS two months or more since Charlton Foyle had booked a passage to Honolulu on a trading schooner. He had been wandering aimlessly in the summer ways of the world, avoiding the death to which a dozen doctors had doomed him, yet not gaining the health without which life is of a doubtful value.

At Honolulu he had asked to continue on the schooner indefinitely. He did not like the two men who appeared to be the joint owners of the vessel, but that was an unimportant consideration, for he was indifferent to those around him. The schooner was well-found. He had lived less luxuriously on liners of fifty times the tonnage. He felt that the voyage had been beneficial beyond his previous experiences, and was anxious to continue it. They had demurred at first. They excused themselves on the plea that they would be visiting a succession of distant islands, at some of which they might be detained, and that the date of their return was uncertain.

When they found that this did not deter

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him, they named a figure which they probably thought would be prohibitive. But in the end they had agreed, though with obvious reluctance, and after a quarrel between themselves, which he had partly overheard, though he did not understand its meaning. In view of what he knew later, he was surprised that they had consented at all—unless they were each so afraid of the treachery of the other that they welcomed even a stranger, who must be an embarrassment later. Unless, of course, he were—removed.

He did not know, even now, what dark secrets might explain the events that had followed—which do not concern us now—though it is a tale which might be worth the telling. He only knew that, after a load, of whatever nature, had been taken aboard in the night-time from a nameless beach, they had burst into a sudden quarrel, in which knives had been drawn, and from which they had been separated by the efforts of a crew that appeared to consist about equally of the adherents of either.

And then, on a later night, when he had lain on deck, as he sometimes did, unsuspected in the shadows, and they were anchored beside another nameless beach, a boat had been lowered and stealthily loaded by the men who held the watch, one of the partners superintending. And just as it appeared that the work was finished, the other had rushed up, with his party behind him, and the deck had become the scene of sudden violence, oaths, bare knives, and pistol-shots, and the cough of a dying man.

On a moment's impulse he had dropped over the side into the loaded boat as the nearest safety from the flying shots of a quarrel which did not concern him, and then become aware, with mingled feelings, that the mooring-rope had parted, and that he was adrift on the ocean.

The distance had widened rapidly from the anchored schooner, while the noise of the fight continued and fell. After an interval of silence, he had heard two shots, and had supposed that the victorious party were disposing of what remained of their opponents. Then there had been a brief silence again, and then a pandemonium of cries that told that the loss of the boat had been discovered.

Should he hail them? He had experienced a natural hesitation. There would be so little difference in one shot more, and one more corpse for the sea's disposal. And, while he doubted, he drifted further away, into a momentary security, for the night was dark and starless.

As he drifted thus, he realized that his peril might be greater for his silence, were he to be in sight of the ship when the dawn rose, and that his alternative was to be an outcast in the loneliest wastes of the Pacific, where a thousand miles were unsailed and uncharted. But even while he realized his dilemma, the difficulty of explaining his silence had increased, and the distance widened. The ennui of his physical condition inclined him to the choice of inaction. The cries grew fainter, and died away.

The dawn showed him an open ocean without sail or sight of land.

IT WAS typical of Charlton's disposition, though a condition of health rather than character, that, having assured himself that his rear was secure, and decided his purpose, he was in no haste to commence it. He became conscious that he was hungry, and ate a meal at his leisure. Having done this, he was increasingly aware that he was tired from a night's vigil, and from the toils in which he had spent it. As the time passed, and there came no threat from the dark aperture above him, he became assured that it held no menace. He did not resolve on sleep, rather it resolved upon him, as he ignored it idly. In the end, sleep he did, and for some hours though his sleep was light and watchful.

Doubtless, when he awaked, he was the better for sleep and food, and he went about his preparations with a careful deliberation. In the boat there was a lantern, which he lit, and, having no belt, he fastened it round him with a length of rope. He placed a loaded revolver in a righthand pocket.

He looked with hesitation at a very serviceable sword, straight and sharp, neither too light nor too heavy, which was among the boat's offensive equipment, but he rejected the thought. It was unlikely enough that he would meet with any living thing. If he should do so, they might not be unfriendly. If they were doubtful in their demeanor, a display of weapons would not increase their good-will. More definite in its objection was the fact that he was not used to the wearing of such a weapon, and that it might impede his legs in climbing. Every way the revolver was best and should be sufficient.

The climb was not easy.... The supports, though firm enough, of whatever age or

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metal, seemed very far apart. The foot-holes were sometimes difficult to find. Clinging closely to the face of the rock, he had to grope for them with a free foot, the hold of the other sometimes feeling insecure as he did so. He wondered whether the staples would hold, were his whole weight suddenly dragged upon them. He did not like the thought of falling upon the hard stone below. He imagined himself there with a broken leg, struggling to get into the boat before the returning water should drown him—and his life afterwards, if he should be able to live under such conditions. The penalties of accident are heavy to a lonely man.

His arms ached badly. Probably he threw more strain upon them than a more accustomed climber would have done, and his muscles were unused to such effort.

When it seemed that he could climb no more, he realized that it might be harder to return than to continue. He rested for a few moments, so far as rest was possible in such a posture, and started upward again. A doctor might have told him that such experiences were all that were needed to complete a cure that the sea-winds had made possible. A man may die in a gradual lethargy, thinking that he has no will to live, who would yet be roused by a sudden threat of death, before he had gone too low for his will to wake to the conflict.

He was impeded also by the lantern, which would not keep clear of the wall, as he had designed to sling it, but he was glad of its light when he came at last to a place of landing.

At least—should he land? For some time he had left behind the open space of the tunnel and had been ascending a narrow shaft about a yard square. It still continued upward into the darkness, but behind him there was now an opening into an unlighted chamber. Loosing one hand, he leaned sideways from the wall and raised the lantern. He saw nothing but a bare rock floor and an empty darkness.

He was aching to rest his straining arms, and for the security of a solid floor, but still he hesitated. He did not doubt that he could step safely to the floor that was about three feet behind him—but the return? He thought that it might not be so easy to reach forward and clutch the rings, or to stride over vacancy to those precarious footholds. He had a vision of starving there with all his stores beneath him. The bare darkness of the chamber gave no promise of hospitality, nor probability of exit. It might be that the way out (if way there were) was to continue upward.

While he doubted, weariness resolved the problem. He was too exhausted for descent or for further climbing. He reached out a foot, felt firm rock, leaned his weight upon it, and landed easily.

After a short rest, he commenced to explore the chamber. He was not keenly curious, nor did he feel anxious as to what he might discover. The physical exhaustion following the exertions of the night and day, acting on a body which was still searching for health rather than in possession of it, left his mind dull and aloof from his surroundings, now that the need for further effort had lost its urgency.

The lantern showed him a rock chamber, bare and black, about ten feet high, and of about twice that width. Its length was greater, and the light was insufficient to reveal it fully. He judged that its direction was toward the cliff-face, which limited its possibility.

He decided to make a circuit of the walls. If they should show no exit, he must continue to climb into the darkness or give up the enterprise and return to such hospitality as the sea might offer.

Turning to the short inner wall, he came at once to an open passage about three feet broad, and high enough for a man to walk freely. This must run inland, he thought, and gave a better prospect of reaching the surface. So far as the light showed, it was not level, but sloped steadily, though not steeply, upward.

He took a few steps along it and then returned, reluctant to leave an unexplored possibility of danger behind him. He would not risk the chance of anything cutting off his return to the boat, or gaining possession of it in his absence. He resolved that he would first complete the circuit of the walls of the chamber.

EMERGING from the passage again, he took the wall left-hand, casting the light before him. He trod in a fine dry dust, which increased in depth as he went forward. The light flickered upon the length of the northern wall. Dim and huge, he caught the figure of a man. He stopped, lifting the light to look more closely. He saw the drawing of a human form, with wide stag-like horns. It was colored a dull red.

The figure was crude, powerful, brutal. It was human, and yet not human. It might be god—or devil. It might be the

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work of an artist to whom the two had been one. Because art cannot be powerful without sincerity, no artist of our own or of any historic period could have drawn that figure. Charlton may not have realized this, but he recognized that he was looking upon the work of a dim antiquity.

The figure was not more than eight feet high, including the horns, yet it gave an impression of overshadowing size, and of an insatiable ferocity. He shivered, as though chilled, though the cavern was not cold.

He noticed that the figure held a sword in its left hand. He thought that its shape was not unlike that which he had left in the boat. He had an absurd fancy that it was the same. Always the sword, he thought. Races and civilizations rise and die, and their records pass from the minds of men, but the sword continues. Always the sword. His mind wondered and wandered. The figure held it hypnotized. He pulled himself free with difficulty. He looked down in the dust in which he trod—a very fine dry dust—and it had a new significance. It was the dust of things long dead—very long dead.

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He went on with altered feelings, as of one who invaded an ancient sanctuary, or a forgotten tomb. The thought that he must beware of the presence of living men had left him wholly. And then, as he completed the length of the chamber—it was surprisingly long—and turned the corner to the shorter wall, he came on something which obliged him to adjust his mind afresh. It was a brass cannon. He saw it while still a few feet away, and at the first glance it was unmistakable.

Coming closer, he saw that it was swivel-mounted, of no recent pattern. He ran the light along it, touching it in wonder to assure himself of its reality. It was covered with a thin coating of dust. He noticed a hint of verdigris at the touch-hole. Otherwise it showed clear and bright as he rubbed the dust aside.

He thought that he saw some writing upon it—or was it ornamental scroll-work only? Looking more closely, he read—*The Fighting Sue, 1866.* That was definite; but it might have been at a later date that it found its home in this solitude. He looked round for anything which might give further explanation, but he found nothing. There was no powder or ball. There was no other object.

A line of light, very faint, which did not come from the lantern, caught his notice. Looking at the wall which fronted the cannon's muzzle, he saw a wooden shutter, wide and low, beneath which the light entered. It was made of a hard elm-like wood, showing no sign of decay. It was suspended on a long horizontal hinge. He tried to raise it, and found that he could do so after some effort, though it did not move easily.

He looked through an embrasure cut through two feet of rock. It was not very large on its inner side, but it was shaped in a widening funnel, sloping downward. It showed a broad extent of ocean below him, with long waves rolling inward. If it had been made for the cannon, it, at least, must be recent. But what purpose of defense could it serve—could it ever have served—in this lonely place? Who had left it, and how, and when?

He could find no answer.

But he saw that there were traces of two occupations: one of an incalculable antiquity, and one which, in comparison, was but of yesterday.

With this thought in mind, he observed that the dust was much thicker along the walls than in the center of the chamber, where it had the impression of many feet, and, looking closely, he was sure that some at least of these feet had been booted.

He completed the examination of the remaining wall, but made no further discovery.

He paused again at the mouth of the shaft, hesitating as to whether he should return to the boat, or explore the tunnel before doing so. He could not resolve the significance of all that he had seen, but it had diminished both his hope and his fear. He now imagined himself alone in a place where men had once been, but which they had long deserted. He had no reason to fear any hostility, nor to hope for any assistance.

The one problem which remained was that of an inland exit from the passage which he had discovered. That was, at least, probable.

If there were none, his course was clear. He must put to sea again when the conditions appeared favorable. His supply of water would not last forever. That consideration alone was decisive, for these caves showed no stream, nor any faintest trickle of moisture. If he put to sea again, he might find another side to the land, where it would be possible to beach the boat without danger. But this was doubly doubtful, for he knew that his measure of control of the boat gave little prospect of reaching such a goal, did it exist, of which he had no evidence.

On the other hand, if he should find that the passage gave him access to a desert land, he would have to decide whether it would be the better to remain there or to risk the dangers of the sea once more, after he had replenished his stock of water and perhaps augmented the store of food which he carried. It was no hopeful prospect to drift at the mercy of sea and wind, knowing that his life was forfeit to the first serious storm that the days would bring. But then there would be no haste to decide. Really, there was no haste now. He felt tired and lethargic. Had the return to the boat been easier, he would have taken it at once, and rested there before he explored further.

As it was, he stood hesitating, and the lantern decided him. The light flickered, and he observed that the candle which it contained was almost finished. The thought that he might be obliged to stride across the hollow shaft in the darkness waked a sudden panic. Very carefully, lest a jerk should extinguish it, he slung the lantern to his side. He saw the metal loops in the wall before him, and in the

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urgency of the failing light he leaned forward boldly to grasp them. He hung a moment while his feet scraped for the holes, and the light went out as he found them. But it was easier to descend than it had been to climb upward, and he had beneath him a more definite and desired objective.

It was long after noon when he regained the boat, and the tide had risen far, though it had not yet reached it. He had gained this much by his enterprise; he was no longer anxious lest any hostility should threaten him from the aperture above him. If there were any men living who had access to that gloomy chamber (which he greatly doubted), they were making no use of their knowledge, and it was little likely that they would be aware of his presence. He ate with an appetite such as he had not known for a long time; after which, he decided to wait till the next day before continuing his exploration. He put a fresh candle into the lantern, though he did not light it; laid it beside the loaded rifle, near to his hand, and settled himself into the bed that he had made in the stern of the boat, on which he had slept so many nights while the summer seas had rocked him.

He did not sleep at once, as he had expected to do. He lay awake till the darkness came, and the boat was lifted again in the arms of the advancing water. He felt her pull on the cables, now on this, now on that, as the waves swayed her. Soon she settled to a motion which was gentler and more regular than that to which he had been accustomed on the open sea. But still he did not lose consciousness. Perhaps he missed the stars overhead. When at last he slept, he dreamed—dreams of the kind which cause the sleeper to wake with a sense of misery and foreboding beyond reason.

HE WAKED in a different mood from that with which the night had assailed him. He cared nothing for dreams, or for the dust of forgotten days. He was of no mind to venture again upon a deserted ocean, in a boat which he could not guide, if there were any better possibility. By the coastline he had seen he judged that the land must be of considerable extent. If it were uninhabited, it might give the means of sustaining life very easily in such latitude. The cave above him offered shelter already, which appeared to be his for the taking. If there were other inhabitants, they might be friendly. He could explore with caution. He need not show himself till he were sure that it would be safe to do so. Everything depended upon a landward exit to the passage he had discovered, or to the shaft above, and surely it was probable that one of these would give it.

He became keen to start, hurrying his morning meal, and even considered carrying up some of his possessions, his mind beginning to regard the upper chamber as his headquarters, rather than the boat which had brought him to it. He resisted this impulse, but he started in good spirits, equipped for a day's absence. He was less indifferent to life, and more alert to meet it than he had been for years. Circumstance had pressed upon him till he had been forced to react against it, and it had occupied his mind so that he was not even aware of the change which it had induced.

He climbed more quickly than yesterday, and was soon in the deserted chamber. He resolved to examine it once again before entering the tunnel, lest he should have overlooked anything of significance on his first circuit.

He found nothing; but, coming to the wooden shutter which covered the embrasure, it occurred to him that he would gain some light if he should fasten it upwards. Examination showed that this had been done by means of short chains and staples which were fixed into the rock. Having raised it thus, and satisfied himself that it was firmly held, he leaned out to survey the scene beneath him. It was idly done, a moment's gazing at the sunlit water before he returned his eyes to the dark interior.

A moment later, he was going up the dark tunnel. It was a gentle, steady ascent, straight and long. The tunnel was quite dry. The air was good enough, though he could feel no current. Becoming curious on the point, he exposed the flame of the lantern. It bent, though very slightly. It indicated a very gentle passage of air in the direction in which he was going. He took this to imply that there must be some opening before him, and his pace increased, though he watched his steps carefully. After what he thought to be about half a mile, the ascent ceased. For a short distance the floor was level, then it began to descend. Here he passed an opening on his left hand, but he decided to continue straight forward. There was still no sign of light ahead, but he was suddenly aware that the walls had ceased. He stopped abruptly, daunted by what he saw. He was

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in a dark chamber, such as he had left at the other end of the passage. But it was not empty. It was choked with snakes. They writhed in heaps on the floor. They were piled to his own height in fantastic contortions. He moved slightly, and something cold and soft flicked his cheek.

He cried out sharply. But even as he did so, he had subdued the first impulse of panic, and had realized its foolishness. It was a vegetable growth that confronted him. Root or branch—he could not tell which. Leafless, livid, fantastic, writhing forms, with pale tints of green or yellow. Advancing upon them, he saw that they entered through an aperture in the wall before him. They crushed in, shutting out all light, almost all air. He wished that he had brought the sword to hack through them. Evidently there was a way out where they entered. He could see no other.

He was excited and eager now to find what the outside might offer. He was in no mood to be deterred by such an obstacle. He laid down the lantern and commenced to clear the way. Inspecting them more closely, he decided that he was confronted by the arms of some creeping plants which, having lost themselves through the window of this chamber, maintained a sickly existence in the darkness.

He found them tough and difficult to sever, and if he pulled as he broke them, a further length would be drawn in, and he had little gain for his effort. But he worked with energy, and soon had his way clear to a window about three feet square, though he could see nothing through it. The creeper filled the opening, which pierced a wall of rock two or three feet in thickness. Even when he had cleared it sufficiently to discover the limit of its depth, the same growth covered it, a curtain through which no observation could penetrate.

Leaning forward, he worked gently at the screen which closed his view. He was cautious now, not knowing what strange sight might be near him. Finding how thick and close was the obstacle which confronted him, he tried to break more of the impending growth away, but he was confronted now with the thicker stems of the main growth of the plant. It was a living matted wall three feet thick, with stems as thick as his own thigh, through which he at length worked a sufficient opening for the light to enter.

Lying forward, half on the floor of the aperture and half on the supporting creeper, he at last saw the land outside.

A wide prospect, several miles in extent, lay beneath and before him. He was looking out from a hillside, not so abrupt as were the cliffs to seaward, yet so steep that it could have been climbed with difficulty but for the vegetation which covered it, which appeared to be of one kind only. The backsloping side curved forward to right and left in a gigantic arc, as though the whole island were one huge volcanic crater (as perhaps it had been), and it was draped and hidden from base to skyline in a garment of glossy green, as dark as winter ivy, formed by the giant creeper, which flowered profusely with enormous saucer-shaped flowers of a plumbago-blue color, and of an overpowering fragrance.

But Charlton's first glance was not upon this garmenting of the rocky wall from which he looked. He had not pushed his way out sufficiently far to see it. He was aware of flat ground two hundred feet beneath him, parrot-green, looking like a grazed field, and beyond that a dark forest of trees, growing close and high, at the sight of which he felt chilled, though the air was warm and windless, for it recalled a forest of which he had dreamed in the night, and which he had feared to enter.

He did not doubt that it was the same, and that the dream had warned him against it.

From his vantage of height he could see somewhat over and beyond the forest, which stretched for several miles before him. Beyond was higher ground, thinly wooded. There was no sign of cultivation, or of the abodes of men, except—far to southward — something shone marble-white in the sunlight.

It might be house or temple. He could not tell.

Encouraged by the solitude of the scene, and reflecting that no creature, human or other, could have been using the entrance he occupied for many months, nor, probably, for a longer period, he pushed further outward, as far as he could do it with safety, till half his weight was upon the branches of the creeper. He saw the crater-like curve of the flower-clad cliff from which he looked. He supposed that it might continue on either hand, until it encircled the island. It must be an island surely!

He remained there for a long time, satisfied that he could not be seen either from beneath or above, and watching for any sign of moving life. He heard the cries of sea-birds, and of others from the forest.

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He saw many doves, of an unfamiliar kind, which flew to the hillside. Doubtless they rested in the green-clad wall from which he looked. He thought that he heard the chattering of monkeys. He noticed that the forest had little resemblance to the wooded places of the Pacific islands among which he had wandered.

He decided he would bring up all the stores from the boat into the greater security of the chamber above it. Perhaps he would bring them here in time. There was time in plenty. A lifetime, it might be. He would do that first and make all things secure, and he would venture out at his leisure. It would be easy to clamber down the sloping wall, with the growth of the creeper three feet thick upon it. He could not fail if he tried. Something moved at the edge of the forest. He had beccme weary of watching, and did not notice it as it first emerged. It was like a large dog.

It was going to a little pool that lay between the trees and the open green beneath him. (Why did the trees end so suddenly? What was the meaning of the bare green level beneath him? his mind wandered to ask.) The creature stood upright, and he saw that it was a man. It went down on all fours again, and he saw that it was a beast. It was in a clearer light now. Men can see far in the glare of a tropic noon. Charlton saw that it had horns on its head. Horns like a goat. It put a bearded face to the water. Having drunk, it rose upright again. Certainly it was a man. Very hairy, or perhaps wearing a coat of skins. And yet the feet were hooved unless the light deceived him. The creature dropped on all fours again. It disappeared.

Charlton's curiosity was aroused. He would explore that forest when he was ready. The creature, man or beast, had not seemed very formidable. But he would take the rifle when he did so.

CHAPTER II

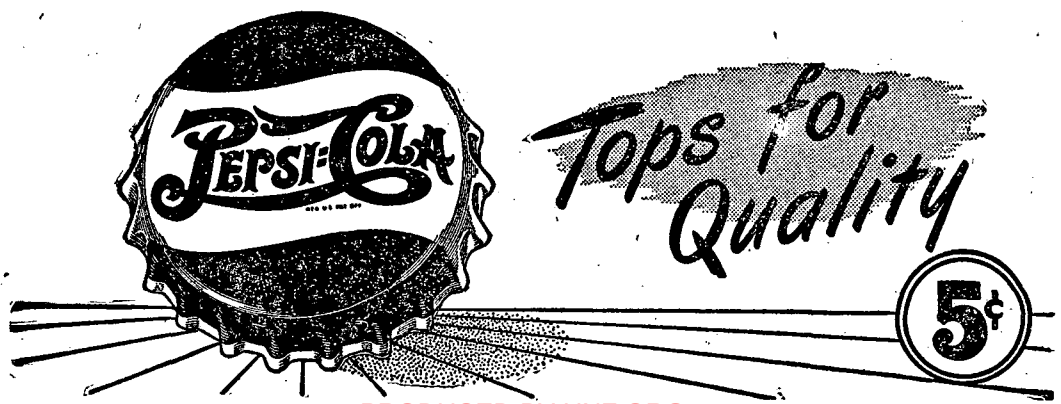
THE ISLAND COLONY

CAPTAIN ANDREW SPARROW of the *Fighting Sue,* pirate, carried on business for twelve years or more in the middle of the last century. He might not have continued successfully for so long a period had he not emulated the caution of the fox, that does not rob the hen-roosts near his own earth. He made his home in the equatorial regions of the North Pacific, which was then a lonelier ocean than it is today. He lay await for his prey in other seas. Then the *Fighting Sue,* Boston-built, brigantine-rigged, with five port-holes a side, a long bow-chaser, and two brass cannon on the quarter-deck for use in a flying fight, did not live up to her name unless she were compelled to do so, which was seldom, for she was fast on any wind, and when she hunted she was not cumbered with cargo. She bullied, robbed, and ran.

She had fought at times, when fight she must—once with a Dutch frigate, from which she had been saved by darkness and a rising sea, with the loss of a top-mast and a third of her crew. But escape she did, and with honor of its kind, for Captain Sparrow had handled her well.

When twelve years had gone, he decided that it would be tempting a forbearing Providence too far to continue his operations longer. In this his judgement was sound, as events proved.

His plans had long been made. He did not intend to risk his life by returning to lands that were at one in their objections to the profession which he had followed



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so successfully. He knew an island where he could retire—it was uncharted, far from shipping lanes, and inaccessible.

He did not plan only for himself. He planned for his crew. He did not intend that any wandering seaman should be in a position to betray him. He proposed that they should land with him, and that the ship should be sunk, so that further wandering would be impossible. He kept this part of his plan in his own mind. He would be the king of a new land.

He had schemed this long, and had perfected the details of his design. He had wealth, but it would be of little use after he had separated himself from the means of spending it.

There was a port in Chile where he was known, and which he could enter in comparative safety. Here he puchased stores of many kinds, and in great quantity. Here he took on board the wives of some of his men, who had made the place a furtive and infrequent home. Lest the port authorities should regard this as evidence that he was not returning, and think it no longer worth their while to grant him immunity under such circumstances, he cut his cable and ran out to sea in the night, when he had taken them aboard.

He made a good voyage, and landed his stores in safety, though with much labor, owing to the nature of the approach to the caves through which he must bear them.

Having done this, the devil tempted him. He had still much gold, and forever is a long time. He was able to think of many things which he might still purchase, of which he had nothing, or of which he might be glad to have more. He determined on a last voyage before he sank the ship.

With the stores which he had put ashore he left the women and eight of his men. He left also his son, Jacob Sparrow, then a child of ten years. He landed most of his powder. His predatory career was over, and he did not expect to need it.

Before sailing, he invaded the island in force. He made his way through passages which had been cut through the rock to the cliff-tops. He descended the inner side of the cliff, and lost two men in an attempt to cross the bogs beneath it.

Abandoning this design, he continued along the top of the cliffs until he reached the south side of the island. Here he found a safer descent to fertile ordered land. There were some miles of park-like garden-ground, bearing fruits of many kinds, and a luxuriance of tropic flowers. This garden was tended by a number of huge birds, reminding Captain Sparrow of the cassowaries of Patagonia, but much larger. He would have been a tall man who could have looked over their backs, and their heads were nine feet from the ground. Their work was mainly to weed and prune, keeping space for the selected plants, and restraining them to their intended places. They did this most frequently by the simple process of eating that which was redundant. They stirred the soil with their beaks, leveling it with raking motions of their three-toed feet.

Coming up on a number of these monstrous birds, the men looked to their muskets. But Captain Sparrow ordered them not to fire, and the birds neither retreating nor molesting them, but only raising their long necks, and surveying the intruders with sardonic eyes, they passed through quietly.

BEYOND the garden they came to a palisade thirty feet high, dividing it from the untamed luxuriance of a tropic forest. The forest was unlike anything which they had seen in Central America, or in the Indian-Archipelagos, though it had some characteristics of both. There was a remarkable absence of noxious insects of all kinds even in the swamps.

Turning back through the garden-land, they came to the dark mass of an ancient temple, and to other buildings beyond it. These were closed and silent. Their windows, glazed with a somewhat opaque glass, were high and few, and too narrow for a man to have passed through them. Their approaches were always the same—stairs which wound upwards, steep and very narrow, in the thickness of the wall. He would have been a bold man who would have adventured to climb them without knowing the reception to which the next turn might bring him. Captain Sparrow waited for three days while there came no sign of life from these dwellings.

He camped in a large hall, built of white stone, which was about half a mile from the temple on a slight hill, and which stood open and empty. He had with him a force of forty men, and he had his hands sufficiently occupied in maintaining discipline among them. But he would have no relaxation till he had disposed of the military problem which confronted them. Up to this time he had prudently left the women on board with the remainder of the crew.

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He did not allow his men to molest the great birds, which continued their work with apparent indifference, but he gave them permission to shoot some of the little monkeys that abounded in the trees, to demonstrate the nature of their weapons to those who (he felt) were watching them from the silent temple. He also permitted them to invade the forest, where they were mobbed by a troop of the goat-foot satyrs, till they were obliged to shoot one in self-defense. Knowing nothing of mythology, they were not concerned as to whether it were allied either to men, or goats, or gods. They were hungry for fresh meat, after some months of salt junk and ship's biscuits, and they cooked it, as they had done the monkeys, and with results which were even more satisfactory.

Captain Sparrow's patience, often exercised before when he had hove-to for long weeks on a deserted ocean waiting for an expected victim, was again justified when a man emerged from the temple on the morning of the fourth day. Having news of this from a watching scout, Captain Sparrow drew his men into order, and received his visitor with some aspect of dignity upon the lawn which sloped away from the hall of which he had taken possession.

He found himself confronted by a man a head taller than himself, young, lean, dark, austerely handsome, and remote in his aspect. He did not appear to be impressed or interested by the display of disciplined force which met him. His aspect was aloof, but not discourteous.

He did not attempt speech, which would have been obviously futile. He opened a roll of papyrus in his hand, and showed a neatly painted map. With a courteous gesture he proposed that Captain Sparrow should examine it with him upon the long table which ran down the center of the hall.

Captain Sparrow, who had had other more or less constrained interviews with the masters of the vessels on which he had levied blackmail, many of whom had been unable to speak a common tongue, was quick to accept a suggestion and to appreciate an attitude. Telling his men briefly to stand their ground, he walked in with his visitor to inspect a map which showed the whole island in colored detail.

Half an hour later, without word spoken or written, they had arrived at an understanding which appeared to be mutually satisfactory.

Whether Captain Sparrow intended to observe it I cannot say.

The visitor (who was the son of the priest of Gir) produced a duplicate of the map with coloring materials. Swiftly and neatly he painted a space around the temple grounds a dull red. That was to be sacred to his people. At the southwest of the island a space was painted blue. That was reserved for the privacy of the invaders.

Between these two, and including the hall in which they stood, was a green space which would be common to both, and in which acquaintance could be made if both parties should desire it. On a waxed blank beneath the map the visitor laid his open hand, impressing it as his signature. He invited Captain Sparrow to do this also, so that the two hands crossed, and he then fastened the map to the wall at the higher end of the hall.

Besides this, Captain Sparrow had learned by gestures, and by swift and skillful sketches, that it would be a cause of difference to continue to shoot monkeys; that it would be not only such, but in some way dangerous in itself, to molest the great birds; that his people were at liberty to enter the forest when they would and to shoot the satyrs, providing that they did not kill more than one in any one moon; and that there was a stretch of swamp at the north of the islands where there was a variety of blue pig, like a small tapir, which they could kill at their own pleasure; and he had signified his acceptance of these arrangements.

He offered drink and gifts of various kinds, but his guest declined them with an aloof politeness and departed.

Captain Sparrow was a good judge of men in certain relations. He sailed away two days later, confident that the treaty would be honorably observed by those with whom he had made it, and having promised to hang anyone, whether man or woman, who should cause trouble by infringing its provisions while he was absent.

The men that he had left had been chosen by lot from among those whose women were now ashore, as these men were the most loath to start out on a further voyage; and by leaving only such as were married themselves, he judged it the less likely that trouble would arise with the wives who were temporarily deserted, and that those to whom they belonged would be the less reluctant to leave them.

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HAVING ordered all these things with due thought for his people, as a king should, he set out on his last voyage, promising the unmarried men an opportunity for female companionship at some port of call.

He sailed with a fair wind for the East Indies—virtuously resisting the impulse to plunder a clumsy merchantman that lumbered away in a very natural panic at the sight of the long low hull, the yawning port-holes, the wide spread of canvas, and the flagless masthead—and he was south of the Ladrones when he encountered a succession of light varying winds, which left him drifting on a calm sea over which a heavy mist settled.

The mist cleared during the night, and the dawn, coming with a light breeze from the northeast, showed him Her Majesty's corvette, *Condor,* of twenty guns, about three cables' length distant.

Captain Sparrow was ready for most emergencies, and he opened the game by running a signal of distress to the masthead, and following it, when the inevitable inquiries came, by the announcement that he had had seven deaths from smallpox, and that twelve men were sick below of the same malady.

It would have been sufficient to render many captains disinclined for any avoidable intimacy, but Lieutenant Mainwaring, who was in command of the corvette, was of a skeptical and inquiring mind. He asked questions as to the charter and destination of the brigantine, which were answered fluently enough, but the replies were unconvincing.

Lieutenant Mainwaring signaled, *I am sending a boat.* Captain Sparrow replied that he did not need help.

The corvette, having no occasion to conceal her suspicion, had already trained her guns upon the victim of her unwelcome curiosity.

Captain Sparrow watched the approaching boat, and courteously lowered a ladder amidships.

Then, very suddenly, the rigging was alive with men, and the helm went over. There was a cry from the unlucky crew of the boat as they endeavored vainly to avoid the impact of the vessel's side. The next moment the broadside of the *Condor* flashed and roared. The *Fighting Sue* heeled and shivered as it struck her. There was an outcry of death and wounds on her gun-deck. A round-shot, coming through an open port, caused one of her guns to break loose. It slid across the sloping deck, disabling two who were not agile enough to avoid it.

But the *Fighting Sue* tacked and came round across the stern of the *Condor,* raking her from end to end with a broadside which, though not so heavy as she had taken, was the more deadly in its delivery.

Unfortunately for the *Fighting Sue,* it was a maneuver which could not easily be repeated.

Lieutenant Mainwaring, though a very angry man, and handicapped by the necessity of lowering a boat to pick up the crew of the first, who were now struggling in the water, did not allow himself to be flustered. Captain Sparrow had cause to observe, with a natural annoyance, that he was not the only man who could handle a ship efficiently under fire. The *Fighting Sue* was slightly to windward of her adversary, which might have been to her advantage, had she been seeking to close at her own choosing, but it was more doubtfully so when she only sought escape, and to avoid exposing herself to the heavier guns which were waiting to be trained upon her.

WITH all their canvas spread to a wind which was still too light to give them more than very gradual motion, the two ships showed like contending swans, white on the tropic blue, dodging and twisting as they endeavored to bring their own guns into play while avoiding the opposing broadsides.

The guns flashed and thundered, and wisps of heavy sulphurous smoke drifted along the wind.

There were few casualties at this stage of the duel, for the fire of either vessel was directed to the masts and spars of her opponent, though with different objects.

Captain Sparrow wished to disable his adversary so that he might put a safe distance between them. Lieutenant Mainwaring wished only to secure his continuing company. So far, chance shook the dice, and threw them when a shot struck the mizzen of the *Fighting Sue.* It did not fall at once, but the next time that the helm went over and the strain came, it snapped off three feet from the deck, and went overside with a tangle of sail and cordage which took five deadly minutes to hack clear so that it floated free.

And meanwhile the *Condor* had closed in and was pouring all her weight of metal into the doomed hull of the *Fighting Sue.* After that, only one end was possible. Even could Captain Sparrow have gained his

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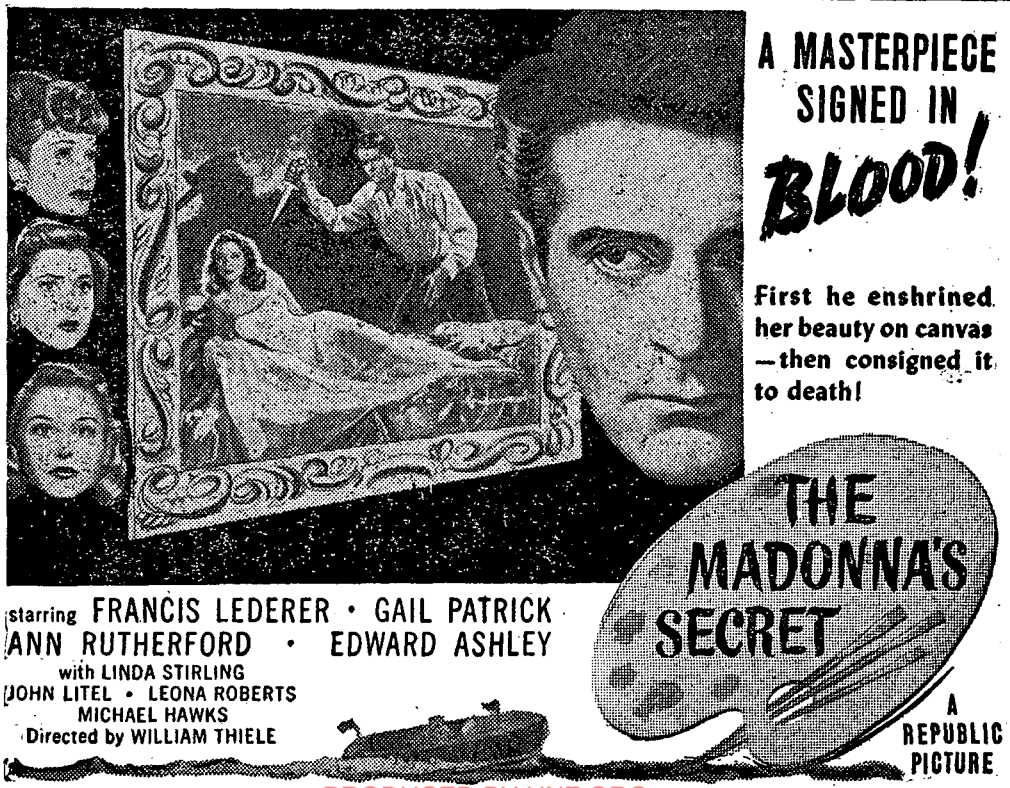
last hope and boarded, it must have been the same end. Larger numbers, better discipline, better morale must have decided. But Lieutenant Mainwaring respected the lives of his men, and he avoided every effort which the pirate ship made, like a cornered rat, to get its fangs fixed into the side of its unrelenting opponent.

After a time it lay still on the water like a wounded bird, but the deadly flashes still broke spasmodically from a gun-deck which was slowly sinking toward the ocean level. What use was there in surrender? Yet yield she did at the last, for the powder failed, Captain Sparrow having put too much ashore when he sailed on this peaceful enterprise.

Lieutenant Mainwaring, boarding the sinking vessel, took off nineteen unwounded prisoners, including the captain. He tumbled the wounded men over the side. He was in no mood to be merciful. He had heard of Captain Sparrow before. And his own losses were serious, and were (he considered) the lives of better men. As to the prisoners, acting on the authority given to naval officers in those seas, he held a swift court martial, and hanged them before sunset. He had offered the chance of at least some months of life to any one who would tell him of Captain Sparrow's headquarters. He should be taken home and tried there.

Yet this slender inducement was sufficient to bring a ready volunteer of treachery, but, unfortunately for himself, the man told the simple truth (excepting only the position of the island, which he did not know), and as it was so obvious that he was lying, he was strung up with the rest, protesting vainly against the incredulity which condemned him. So before sunset they were all hanged except Captain Sparrow himself. It may be that the lieutenant thought he might be induced to speak to better purpose than he supposed that the man had done; it may be that he desired to have some living exhibit to evidence his successful exploit.

Captain Sparrow had leisure to reflect upon the folly of having extended his voyages into the thirteenth year. Being landed in England some six months later, he was tried with more formality than Lieutenant Mainwaring would have considered necessary, but with no less certain issue. He was, however, offered a reprieve if he would give such information as would lead to the recovery of his illicit gains, which were believed to be very great. But this


A MASTERPIECE SIGNED IN BLOOD!
First he enshrined her beauty on canvas —then consigned it to death!
THE MADONNA'S SECRET
starring FRANCIS LEDERER • GAIL PATRICK
ANN RUTHERFORD • EDWARD ASHLEY
with LINDA STIRLING
JOHN LITEL • LEONA ROBERTS
MICHAEL HAWKS
Directed by WILLIAM THIELE
A REPUBLIC PICTURE

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he declined to do. He would not betray his cherished secret, nor the men whom he had left behind. Whereupon he was hanged at Execution Dock.

It may be that he did not trust the promises which were made. It may be he thought that they would not hang him while he remained silent. It is more probable that he was hanged because there was a degree of baseness to which he would not sink. Which might happen to any man.

CAPTAIN SPARROW had not been explicit as to how long he intended to be absent on his last voyage. He was not one who gave his confidence widely. But he was a man to be obeyed; and as his orders had been that the men he left should proceed to the erection of houses, and should maintain peaceful relations with the earlier inhabitants, they continued to behave with quietness and industry until they had settled down to the routine of their new life.

As months passed they must have become increasingly doubtful as to whether they would see him again, but there could never have been a day when the uncertainty was changed into the settled fact. They might have thought that he had marooned them with a deliberate treachery but that was not reasonable, when it was considered that he had left such overample stores for so small a colony, with a great treasure of precious things, and had sailed away with an empty hold. Also, he had left his son. It was perhaps fortunate for this youth (as the world esteems fortune) that the possibility of his father's return was in the minds of his companions while he was gaining the years and confidence which finally enabled him to assert himself as his heir and representative.

By the time that he did this, the isolated community had settled into a debased existence which was to continue for a generation. There had, at first, been some tentative approaches towards acquaintance between them and the original inhabitants, but these had not been developed. There was an absolute lack of congeniality, of common interests or attractions. But there was a deeper cause. It is the peculiar degradation of Europeans (whether from their carnivorous habits, or other differences) that they have the power to cultivate and harbor diseases which are unendurable by other races. Encountering these for the first time, such people die helplessly.

The surviving race is too apt to regard the issue complacently, as an evidence of its superiority. It is as though a sewer should boast that it can tolerate garbage.

The original inhabitants of the island, though they were of apparently finer physique, and of incomparably more equable health, than those who had intruded upon them—having won to this physical condition by a social economy which had systematically eliminated the weakest members of the community—yet suffered, after their age-long isolation from others of their kind, as many inferior races have done in every part of the world when the various diseases of European civilization have reached them.

In six weeks, more than fifty, out of a total population of eighty, were already dead, including the priest of Gîr; his son, who had negotiated the treaty, succeeding him.

The new ruler, having little faith in the characters, or belief in the good-will of his new neighbors, and having an additional weight of responsibility on his mind arising from the fact that he had concurred in rejecting the directions of their oracle (which had shown the natural course of events to be that they should have attacked the invaders when first they landed), gave orders that this mortality should be kept secret, fearing that they would be treated with little ceremony on Captain Sparrow's return if he should learn of the losses which they had sustained.

Now it became the duty of the new ruler to take the risk of any contact with the strangers that might be necessary. And so it became his custom to join them at these monthly festivals, and on some other occasions, eating with them, though without touching the dead flesh, or the foods devitalized by the application of heat, which they preferred. He conversed with them, also, learning their language, as they showed no aptitude at his own. This language was a debased form of English, which shrank and degenerated as the years passed, even from the form in which it had been spoken on the *Fighting Sue*.

It became blended also with words and phrases introduced by the women of mongrel South American origin who formed the majority of the colony, and quaintly streaked with the phraseology of the Bible, the speeches of Charles James Fox, a book on the breeding and management of cattle, and a collection of broadsheet ballads, which had constituted the fortuitous library of the colony. These books had been read by the more active-minded of

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the earlier generation, but the younger had shown no desire to read, nor had there been any with the inclination to teach them.

The island to which fate had consigned them was of such a nature that the necessity for work was of the slightest. The climate was delightful. Food was abundant. They satisfied their inherited desire for flesh with the monthly satyr, and with the blue pigs in the further marsh.

THEY soon observed that the restriction in regard to the shooting of the satyrs was a necessity, in their own interest, if these animals were not to be exterminated. As it was, their numbers were not greatly diminished.

The hunting of these animals constituted the principal diversion of the new colony. The satyrs, having realized the deadly nature of the muskets with which they were attacked, made no attempt at resistance, but fled in a useless terror at the approach of their enemies. They gradually learned that it was only the male satyrs which incurred any danger, and that it was the younger of these which were most to the taste of their assailants.

The females and young would even continue their feeding undisturbed, the while the hunters went past them, beating the bushes for the hiding males, or breaking into wild rush of pursuit when they had started their quarry.

Besides these hunts, there were occasional expeditions to the swamps where the pigs rooted and wallowed. But these creatures were dangerous. The women were left behind, and the men went armed with all the miscellaneous weapons that they had learned to handle during their piratic exploits. They would return with the heavy carcasses of their victims slung from poles, and more than once with a litter in which a wounded companion would bear evidence of the ferocity of these animals.

After this, there would be an orgy of feasting, ending in a drunken saturnalia, for they had not failed to utilize the possibilities of the grapes which abounded wild in the forest, and hung in even heavier clusters from the cultivated vines of the gardens in which they were free to wander.

The years saw other changes. As the possibility of the return of Captain Sparrow and his companions diminished, the women whom they had left behind chose husbands from among those males that remained, not without quarreling and some outbursts of violence, on one occasion with fatal consequence.

The children resulting from these unions were not sufficiently numerous to lead to any excessive increase in the size of the colony. Many of the women were past their first youth, and their lives had not been such as to leave them, as the years had passed, with unimpaired vitality. The island life, in spite of its physical advantages, was not a healthy one, and the children that were born were often neglected or indulged, with detrimental and sometimes fatal issues.

It is an unpleasant fact that the women, mingling freely with the female satyrs, would follow the progress of the hunt, and would combine, with a repulsive, elbowing curiosity, to watch the capture and slaughter of the monthly victim. It seemed that their attitude had gradually affected the female satyrs, until these events were regarded as pleasantly exciting episodes, rather than as attacks upon their kindred by alien enemies, and even the males would emerge from their hiding-places the moment that they knew that a capture had taken place, and watch with an appearance of enjoyment the slaughter and disemboweling of their unfortunate companion.

There was another development which drew a closer link between these people and the half-human beasts on which they fed. They discovered that the satyrs, if caught while very young, could be taught to perform many useful services, and could learn to understand much of the language of their owners, though they made no attempt to speak it.

They captured and reared a number of young females, whom they trained to wait on them, and, in particular, to weave a fibrous cloth, such as was made and worn by the original inhabitants of the island, and which could be variously dyed, a process for which the forest gave abundant materials, both from its vegetable and insect life.

Another, and perhaps the most potent influence upon the development of the community, was the personality of Jacob Sparrow, after he had arrived at a sufficient age to assert an authority which he found no one prepared to challenge.

A successful leader, whether saint or criminal, must possess certain positive qualities, such as are admirable in themselves, whatever may be the uses which exalt or degrade them.

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Captain Sparrow was capable of a cold and calculating brutality, which was sufficiently unattractive. It is difficult to suppose that there are many crimes which he would not have committed, had they been clearly to his advantage. But he had been prudent in enterprise, cool in danger, skilful in maneuver, and with a habit of moderation, even in pillage. He had a sense of order and method, and a personal magnetism which had enabled him to control a succession of lawless crews without permitting license, or using an intolerable severity. Pitiless in his punishments when the occasion required it, he was never either unreasonable or capricious. He was not loved, but he was both feared and respected. In a way, he was trusted. He had a fortunate reputation.

But Captain Sparrow's son did not inherit the better part of these qualities. Gross and ungainly in body, he was destitute of physical courage, and averse to physical activity, but he was gifted with a far-sighted cunning, which enabled him to maintain his position, perhaps more easily than would have been the case had it depended upon the ascendency of more admirable characteristics. He was neither aggressive nor domineering, and so long as he was not impeded in the gratification of the selfish instincts on which his contentment depended, he allowed his followers a full measure of license to pursue their own proclivities. He was, however, jealous of the recognition of his position, and insisted upon the wearing of a battered article of naval head-gear when seated at the head of the long table at which his subjects assembled, while their own heads were required to be uncovered on those occasions.

He had also an unreasoning cupidity, causing him to cherish many articles which had originally been his father's property, but most of which he did not attempt to put to any service of utility, even had it been possible to do so. First amongst these were twenty bars of solid gold, each of about two pounds weight, of the extrinsic value of which he had probably gained some knowledge during the early years which he had spent in a South American seminary.

These were always placed in a neat pile upon the table before him. No one ever attempted to steal them, for the sufficient reasons that there was no place to which they could be removed to any advantage, nor were they of any conceivable use to anyone.

AT the time with which we are concerned, Jacob was an obese old man, gluttonous, silent, and somnolent, but still capable of reacting to the excitements of fear or greed, or to any slight upon the dignity of a position that he did so little to justify. Under such stimuli he would show that the watchful cunning which had distinguished his earlier years was still sufficient to render his ill-will dangerous to those who should be sufficiently indiscreet to arouse it.

His most amiable characteristic was an unreciprocated affection for a son who had been born to him about eighteen years earlier. This son, named by his mother Nicodemus, which had become Demers in the degenerate island speech, was a young man already over six feet in height, of heavy awkward build, slouching forward as he walked, like a great ape, with long arms, and hairy hands.

His hair was long, thick, coarse and black, growing very low on the forehead. His brows were black and prominent. His nostrils were very wide. His jaw was heavy, with exceptionally large and powerful teeth, over which the lips were never entirely closed.

Demers, unlike his father, was of unquestionable physical courage. It was his delight to lead the occasional expeditions against the blue pigs, which were no longer hunted with muskets because the powder, too carelessly used by the earlier generation, was nearly expended. On these occasions he would be the only man who could be relied upon to face the savage beasts when they had turned upon their pursuers, and who had the strength and skill to drive home a boarding-pike, while himself avoiding the angry tusks that were directed against him.

Once, when he had been wounded in the leg by one of these animals, he had burst into a passion of uncontrolled ferocity, causing him to batter the dying body of his assailant, and to trample upon it after all life had ceased, until it was flattened out into the muddy soil, and was judged to be unfit to be used for the food for which it had been hunted.

CHARLTON FOYLE carried out his plan with a systematic thoroughness which was natural to him. Many and weary were the journeys which he made to and from the boat. Many were the loads which could be hauled up only with the help of a rope, and that with difficulty. He had found a smooth slab of stone beside the shaft-

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mouth in the first chamber, to which he had attached no importance previously, though he had stumbled over it on his first landing. He now saw that it was intended to be slid over the opening, which it could cover completely. That was good. But he first found it another use, fastening the rope around it so that he could rest at times when a heavy load was ascending.

The day came when the boat was bare of all but the unstepped mast. Even the cordage, the oars, and the heavy canvas had been hauled aloft. Charlton tested the moorings afresh, and left it there at the tide's mercy. He was glad to have it: he might need it again; with half his mind he hoped to do so; but he had chosen the land.

He pushed the heavy slab over the hole. It was too heavy for one man to move it easily, but his muscles had developed as he had toiled.

He was conscious of a glow of health and a zest for living, such as he had never expected to feel again. With health came confidence, and it was in a buoyant mood that he prepared for the second stage of the campaign which he had planned.

He had already taken the precaution of ascending the steps that went upward beyond the roof of the chamber which he now occupied. He had found another chamber, similar, but without admittance of any light, and entirely empty. There were drawings on the walls of a character of which he did not willingly think. They were of the same evident antiquity as that in the one in which he was now living.

There were dark passages leading to other chambers which he had explored without finding their terminations, but he had noticed one thing which contented him. Beyond a certain limit, the dust of time lay on the floors, and it was only his own footsteps which had disturbed it.

He would explore further at another time. That could wait—and the supply of candles for his lantern was limited. So were his matches.

He was already calculating and hoarding irreplaceable things.

The next step on which he had resolved was to convey small quantities of his immediate necessities to the inland chamber, leaving his main stores in the security of the one that he had first discovered, from which he could replace them as required.

There was a good reason for this—apart from the fact that he did not wish for the added toil of conveying them to the further point—in fact that, while the first was dry, the second was damp. This change had been observable from the point where the passage had commenced to descend, and in the chamber itself water dripped from the roof at one side, forming a small pool in the inner left-hand corner which must have had some means of drainage, as it did not overflow or diminish.

As he worked, Charlton had debated in his mind the advisability of commencing his investigations by climbing up the cliffs rather than down. The creeper would render such an enterprise very easy. He did not think that he was far from the summit. Gaining it, he would have a better view of the island which he wished to explore. He might also contrive some method of signaling to any passing ship, which might be called to his rescue.

But the objections were obvious. Such a signal, were the opportunity to occur, would be equally visible to any unknown inhabitants of the island. He preferred to learn who or what they were before dis-

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closing his existence so freely. To mount to the cliff-top might bring him into an immediate and undesirable notice.

Rather, his mind was concerned to leave his refuge unobserved, and to descend with secrecy. The moon was not full, but it would give light enough, if the sky were clear, for him to climb down and hide at the cliff-foot till the dawn came, and he could see where he went. He recognized that the darkness had its peril as well as its protection. But he did not intend that any living thing should learn of the entrance to his own burrow.

COMMENCING the last stage of his preparations, he cleared the floor of the second chamber from the creeper that he had torn away to make his passage. It had shrunk and withered, and its bulk had diminished. He would render himself conspicuous by throwing it outward, so he carried it back as he made successive journeys, bringing his food and weapons and some bedding for the drier side of the chamber; and, as he thus cleared the floor and refurnished it, he made a discovery which gave him fresh light upon what was before him, and left his mind in an increased wonder.

It was a seaman's chest of the ordinary pattern. It had been hidden beneath the growth of the creeper, and that which he had torn away had given it a deeper burial. It was unlocked. It contained some clothes, rotten with damp; some tools; some trinkets; two or three books. Things that were never of great value except to those who owned them. Some of them were incongruous, as though the possessions of several had been thrown together.

Some of the contents, apart from the mending materials which are in every seaman's chest that the oceans bear, suggested a female ownership. It was easy to conclude that this chest had belonged to one of those whose footsteps he had traced. It confirmed his theory that men had been there at a more recent date than was indicated by the presence of a part of the ordnance of the *Fighting Sue*. It would have given little more information, but for a bulky notebook, which its owner had used for recording his experiences. Charlton seized upon this book with avidity, but it was not easy to decipher, and difficult to understand when he had done so.

It was written in French, which was in itself no difficulty. Charlton had spent two years as attaché to the British Embassy in Paris. He could speak or read the language with equal fluency. But this was the illiterate French of an uneducated man. His constructions were crude, his spelling original. He used words which are unknown to the lexicographer. More serious, he lacked the gift of narrative. He could not appreciate the position of one who was not already familiar with antecedent circumstances. Further, he appeared to have written with a pencil of the poorest quality, and the damp, which had soaked the book, had blurred much of it beyond any hope of interpretation.

Charlton spent many hours over this book, forgetting time and food as he did so.

The one clear thing was a date, written in ink on the first page, with (presumably) the owner's name, "Jean Couteau," beneath it. The date was less than five years ago. The narrative might be later, but how much later there was no means of telling.

After many hours of study, Charlton summarized the facts he had gained.

At a date unknown, but roughly indicated by the diary, and by the condition of the contents of the chest, the writer, a seaman, had been cast away here, under unexplained circumstances and without means of leaving the island, together with a man named Pierre, sometimes called *le charpentier*, and another man named Latour, with a girl Marcelle, who appeared to have been his daughter. Latour was of higher social status than the other two men (the narrator called him *monsieur* more than once, and his Christian name did not appear). Possibly he and his daughter had been passengers on a wrecked or abandoned ship. But that was surmise. He wished to sort out the facts only. At the time at which the narrative had been written Jean was alone. The other three had gone into the interior, and had not returned. The girl had gone either alone and first, or together with Pierre.

It is not clear whether Pierre had gone in ordinary companionship, or to aid, or in pursuit. He was clearly distrusted or disliked, both by Latour and Jean. Latour had gone after his daughter. He had supposed her to be in some danger. He had asked Jean to accompany him. Jean had refused—from fear. Latour had not returned. At the time Jean had written the narrative he had no expectation that he would. But, at the last, Jean had resolved to go also. It was not clear why.

There was little more of actual fact that

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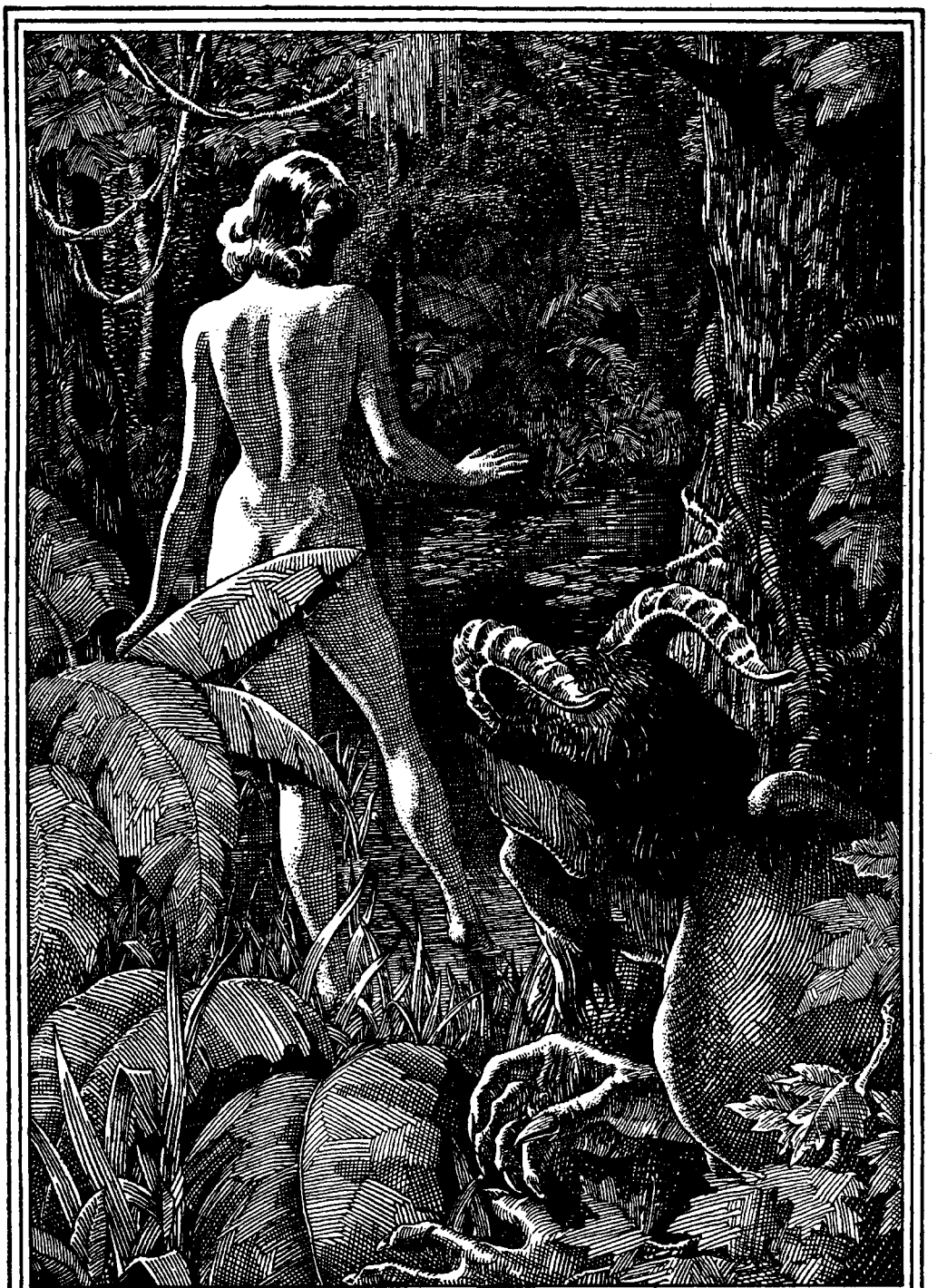

Silence brooded over the scene of tropical peace. . . .

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he could decipher with certainty, but there were allusions that implied that the interior of the island was more or less known, as well as feared, by the writer, either by report or observation. That suggested that some parts might be visited with comparative or entire impunity, and that those who had been lost had gone into some further danger. Jean called it an Isle of Devils. That might mean much, or little. The creature which Charlton had seen might suggest a devil to a vulgar mind. Also, Jean seemed to write under the shadow of dread which he did not understand, even to be drawn to it against his will, if one blurred page had yielded its secret to Charlton's patience.

Anyway, they were gone, all gone.

Carlton laid aside the book, took out the cartridges from his rifle, and cleaned and reloaded it very carefully. There had been several others in the boat—heavier weapons—which he had left in the first chamber, but weight counts in a tropic climate, and the ammunition for them was less plentiful. He hesitated over the sword again—but it would be awkward to wear. He had a fantastic thought that he might be flying back for refuge, and find an enemy in possession who might use it against him. Humoring his own folly, he hid it behind the chest.

CHARLTON knew that the moon would not rise till late. He lay down before the short tropic twilight came, and slept soundly. When he waked and looked out through the creepers that screened his window so deeply, the country beneath him was flooded with silver light. It was too much for his purpose, rather than otherwise. His preparations had been made already. He ate a hearty meal of the preserved food with which his boat had been provisioned, longing the while for the fresh fruits which he did not doubt that he would soon pluck at his pleasure. He had filled his pockets with ship's biscuit, for he did not intend to return before the next night, but he hoped to find a meal which would be more to his liking. He slung the rifle over his back, and climbed out.

The stars were very brilliant.

The descent was easy. It would not have been difficult had the cliff been perpendicular, with such a thickness of clinging growth to support him. As it was no more than a very steep slope, he could scarcely have fallen far had he designed to do so. He would have sunk among the leaves, and the boughs would have caught him.

But he was almost intoxicated by the scent of the great flowers, which came out most strongly in the night-time. He knocked one of them aside, and a night-bird—or was it a giant moth?—flew out on silent wings, with a note of protest which was neither hum nor cry, but something strangely between the two.

He slipped a few feet at the last, for the boughs were thicker and less frequent, and the moonlight deceived him; but he was unhurt, and he paused, drawn back under the shadows, in doubt as to whether he should adventure further in the darkness.

It was three hours to dawn.

He decided that it would be best to move cautiously along the foot of the cliff, lest he should betray the locality of his refuge to any watching eyes when the light came. He turned left-hand, for he had in mind that hint of a white building on the distant hill to southward as his ultimate objective, should nothing hinder him earlier. The ground sloped slightly downward from the cliff-foot for a short space, beyond which was the level stretch of verdure that had shown parrot-green in the sunlight. He was of a mind to cross it, and gain the wood's shelter now, rather than later. He could lie closely there till the night should be over. But he would continue for a while, and not cross opposite to his own lair. Even a lapwing had too much sense to do such a thing as that.

He trod in a very thick herbage, waist-high in places, and drenched with a heavy dew. The hum of insects was round him, that his steps had brushed from their sleeping quarters. He was glad when he saw that the thick growth ceased and the level plain came to the cliff's base. He stepped briskly forward and his foot sank, and the mud held it. It sank—and continued sinking.

He tried to throw his weight back on to the other foot, but it was too late. He had taken a long stride forward, and he could not recover it. He was sunk to the knee now, and the other foot had been dragged forward and was slipping into the slime. He was still sinking steadily. But the foot of the cliff-wall was not beyond the reach of his left hand, and he threw himself sideways toward it. Doing this, he was immersed to the waist.

With both arms he grasped the twisted root of one of the giant creepers, which went down into the bog. He struggled desperately against the clutch of the glutinous clinging slime, but it held him

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firmly. Exhausted to no good purpose, he leaned forward upon the root he held to gain strength and breath: He could scarcely sink further while he remained in that position. To release himself was another matter. But he must avoid panic: there must be some way. After a long rest he recommenced the struggle, but it was unavailing. The bog held and would not let go.

The firm ground could not be far from his left foot—he was so close to the cliff. If it continued to slope in the same direction?—he tried to move a foot toward it. He could not be sure how far he had succeeded. Very slightly if at all. But he persevered. Either by that effort, or because he had sunk even more deeply while he struggled, he became aware that the side of his foot was on firm rock. With that leverage to aid him, he worked somewhat nearer the side. He worked the foot somewhat upward. He drew the other foot higher. The dawn was coming before he knew that the struggle was won, and that he was not destined to disappear beneath the green slime that had so nearly engulfed him.

He was safe, and with a feeling of measureless relief at his escape, but he was exhausted and unfit to go further. He struggled forward until he reached a spot where he could rest on ground which was reasonably level, and sheltered from observation. Then he took stock, in the growing light, of the damage which he had suffered. The slime which had held him was peculiarly adhesive. He was still covered by it, from the waist downward. From that point he looked as if he had been immersed in a bright green paint.

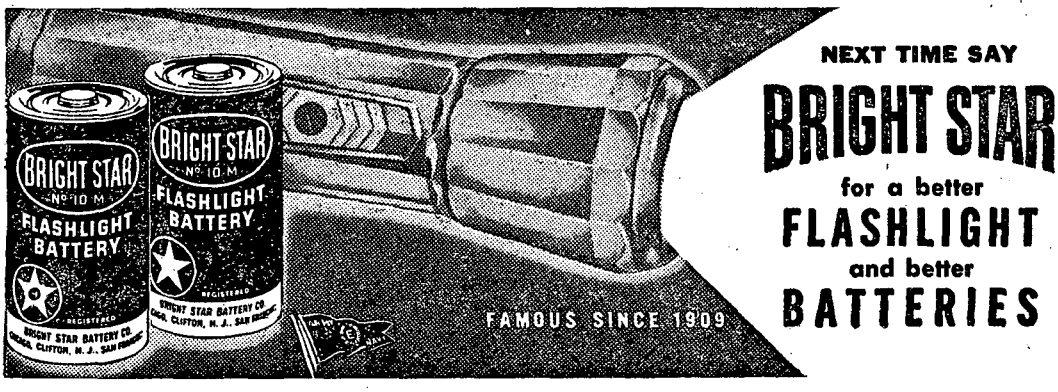
The clothes which he had worn when he left the schooner had been good and new. They were still in serviceable condition—or, at least, they had been so a few hours earlier—though worn and soiled. He had no others. To cleanse them, if it were possible, had become an imperative necessity. But he must rest first. This was something different from his anticipated adventure. He should have been exploring the delights of a tropic forest by this hour, and plucking its pleasant fruits. He realized that to those who go strange ways it is the unexpected that happens. He rubbed his hands with the glossy leaves around him till they were clean of the slime, staining them an enduring yellow with the juice of the leaves as he did so.

Then he examined his rifle. Only the butt had gone under, and having cleaned this, he was satisfied that its utility was unimpaired. His revolver, which had been in a hip-pocket, had suffered more seriously and was beyond any immediate remedy.

The food in his jacket-pocket was but slightly damaged, and he speedily reduced the quantity which would be at the mercy of any further misadventures. His greatest need was water.

HE HAD the cliff on his left hand and the bog on his right. There was no better course than to go along the narrow space between them, and hope for some improvement in the prospect.

This he did for about an hour. The sun had not yet gained sufficient height to overlook the cliff, and the air was pleasantly cool. So far, there had been no means of crossing the bog, and Charlton began to fear that it might encircle the whole of the interior of the island. He considered climbing the cliff, from the top of which he might have a view that would resolve the doubt. If there were a passage across the bog, he might make better progress toward it above than below. If there were none, the clifftop would be the



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limit of his domain. He had had enough of the bog.

While he debated this project there came a change. A narrow space of water showed between cliff and bog. Further, it widened. It was stagnant water, with a thick sediment on its surface of an unwholesome yellow. Patches of rank waterweed showed in places, with a curious iris-like flower of a deep blue streaked with crimson.

There were spaces where the bog appeared to have ceased entirely. Shallow, reedy water stretched to the forest. A crowd of gaily colored water-fowl rose as he approached, and flew northward. Finding a clear-seeming pool, he cupped some water in his hands and tasted it, but it was brackish and very bitter.

The day was becoming hot, and the need of fresh water imperative.

He remembered the pool at which he had seen the creature—man or animal—drinking on the day when he first looked on the land. But that was far behind, and on the other side of the bog.

It was about half a mile further on that he thought it possible to reach the forest. The ground here was irregular. Shallow pools lay in its depressions. Dense canes, ten or twelve feet high, grew on its drier portions. Black mud intervened. In some places, dark pumice-like stones gave a firm footing.

Charlton was eager to overcome the obstacle which held him back from the forest, but the dread of the bog was still upon him. The contending feelings made him at times too venturesome, and at times too cautious. Twice he adventured to cross where the prospect was not attractive. Twice he turned back when it might have been no more hazardous to continue. When at last he crossed, it was to find that he had reached a part of the forest which was so low that he waded at times ankle-deep among rows of trees growing so thickly that there was scarcely space to pass between them.

The ground rose as he advanced. The character of the trees changed. The growth was luxuriant, the colors brilliant. Humming-birds flashed past. Butterflies showed unfamiliar beauties. Great trees flowered like shrubs. Creeping plants festooned them with gorgeous tapestries of blossom. At times the sun, now high in the heavens, broke through the canopy of branches, making a riot of color around him. At times he walked beneath a rich green gloom, shadowing to a dim twilight where the trees were densest. Straight, lofty aisles opened in places, with long vistas that were beautiful beyond description.

There were paroquets among the branches, and tiny monkeys smaller than squirrels.

Charlton forgot even his thirst for a time as he went through this scene of tranquil opulence. He forgot caution also, till he trod on a yellow snake that bit his boot as he killed it.

HE WENT forward more warily, and with an altered observation. The tiny monkeys ate a nut which grew abundantly. It was a very small nut, suitable to their own size, with a brown wrinkled shell. Two would have gone into a thimble. The monkeys pelted each other with shells as they ate. They were obviously carefree and unafraid. They took no notice of him at all.

The nuts were probably wholesome, but they did not attract him. He found grapes, which were more to his liking, and ate heartily.

Then he came to a pool.

It lay quiet and cool and deep, and trees grew to its margin.

He had no thought at first except that here was water for his need. Good water, pleasant to taste. He drank freely. He bathed. He cleansed his clothes as well as he was able, drying them in a sunny spot before he resumed them. It was when he was moving along the bank to reach this spot, where he saw that the sun shone, that he came to the drinking place. It was clear of trees to the water's edge, a gentle downward slope of verdure with a narrow path behind it that disappeared in the forest. The ground was soft at the water's edge, and it was broken by many hoof-marks. Among these he traced the imprint of a human foot. It was small. Not a man's, he thought. Or, if a man's, not that of a European. But it was certainly human.

He looked round. The forest showed no life but that of bird and monkey. He decided to hide, and wait.

He saw that some of the marks were old, and others were quite fresh. It was clearly a regular resort of the creatures of the forest. If he would see before he were seen, here was the place at which to watch.

Bushes grew thickly beneath the trees around the margin of the lake. He made ambush at the side of the path, a few yards from the water's edge.

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He waited there several hours, lying full length, the rifle before him. The heat increased, and the forest grew silent. He was tird, and it was natural that he should sleep in the stillness.

He was wakened in the afternoon by the noise of a rout of creatures that came down the path to the water.

There were about a dozen of them, old and young, and they came with barking, chattering, semi-human sounds that had the effect of a nightmare.

Sight followed hearing, and Charlton doubted that he waked as he watched them.

Man-like in posture when they trotted balanced on their short hind legs—beast-like when they went on all fours, which they did the more frequently—goat-like in horns and hair, and with arms that were more human than those of monkeys —they were the very living forms of the satyrs of Phrygian mythology. It would have seemed reasonable that they should dance to the pipes of Pan as they came down to the drinking-place.

Drinking was a formality. A fat goat-bearded elder approached the waterside while the rest waited. There was a second male, younger, and appearing the more vigorous. He edged up to the water doubtfully. The ancient gave no sign, and he advanced more boldly. The eyes of the rest of the troop were fixed upon him. Suddenly the horns of the elder butted sideways. It was done so quickly and so entirely without previous indication, that, though the younger male withdrew very speedily, he was not entirely successful in avoiding the attack. A horn caught him beneath the ear. He drew back, snarling, with a spreading patch of red on a hairy neck.

One by one, the rest of the party, which consisted of females, adolescents and children, came to the side of the ancient, and were allowed to drink while he surveyed them with a goat-like benevolence. But the offender did not venture again until the whole party were retiring. When they had disappeared along the forest path, he drank at his leisure; but having done so, he showed no disposition to follow them. He crept under the bushes on the opposite side of the path.

Charlton lay very still. He could hear no sound. He supposed that the creature had gone, but could not be certain, and remained motionless.

Then he saw the horned head cautiously lifted and withdrawn. There was a look of greedy anticipation in the goat-like eyes.

For what was he waiting?

Having no confidence in the amiability of the faun or satyr's character, Charlton kept his hand on the rifle-trigger. But he was getting drowsy. He roused himself with an effort. He must not sleep here. But perhaps he had slept? Perhaps he had dreamed the whole thing. It seemed likely. Speculating upon this possibility, he slept, and the heat of the afternoon settled down upon the forest silence like a brooding bird.

CHAPTER III

THE DRYAD

OUT of sleep he started to an alert consciousness of movement in the branches above him. He looked up, but the foliage was too dense for sight to aid him. He looked out, and the satyr's head rose for a moment in the same curiosity as his own. It might have seen him, but that its attention was on that which was approaching overhead. It crouched down out of sight.

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Charlton was conscious that, though it was not dark, the intense noon-light had lessened. Shadows moved from the wooded edges of the water. He must have slept long.

A girl leapt lightly from a branch above, and stood at the water's edge. Slim and straight as a birch, she stood with her back to him. Satyrs there might be. But a wood-dryad was beyond believing.

Watching her, he forgot her danger, if any danger were hers. She stood looking out over the pool, in no haste to enter it, the toes of one foot dabbling in the edge of the water.

He could not see her face; and he knew that he could not place her till he did so. But she was not Polynesian. The small head, with its night-dark hair, thick and curling, but cut short to her shoulders; and the slim well-shaped whiteness of her body, were surely Aryan. They might be English. They might be Greek!

Silent as a cat, the satyr had risen and was approaching behind her.

Charlton's rifle came to his shoulder. He saw the heavy paws outstretched, that would have clutched her hair at the next second, and his finger touched the trigger—but he did not press it. The beast was almost between him and the girl, and a shot was too dangerous. He leapt up, shouting to warn her.

As he did so, with a movement almost too quick to follow, the satyr sprang; the girl, waked by his cry to instant action, slipped aside and leapt upward to the branch from which she had descended. *"Mais non, mon ami!"* she called, with a light laugh, as she gained her shelter. The beast beneath her did not appear aware of Charlton's existence. He stood with raised and clutching hands, screaming and gibbering at the prey he had lost so narrowly.

Cool and mocking, a voice laughed from the green gloom above them: *"Toujours la politesse!"*

Evidently satyrs do not climb.

Half-way up the tree, bowered in green leaves, and unable to see or be seen from the ground beneath her, the girl paused. She was not concerned about the satyr, though she knew that the escape had been a close one. She knew the hour when the satyrs drank, and had supposed them far away in their sleeping-den when she ventured down to the water. She must be more careful in the future. She knew that she was safe from them among the branches. But what was the cry that had warned her? Eyes grew blank as she puzzled it.

A rifle-shot broke the stillness beneath her. She knew what *that* meant. There was only one thing it could mean. If *they* had seen her—she supposed that it was the end, but what could she do but fly to the most remote of her habitations? The stars saw her sleeping, a hundred feet aloft, where a giant tree forked apart and formed a twelve-foot hollow for her hiding-place. An orphan monkey, scarcely longer than a man's hand, that she had found and petted, crept under the warmth of her side and believed itself to be in safety, as a child trusts its parents, who can do so little to aid it, and as a man does not trust God—who can.

The girl lay under the warmth of a gathered heap of leaves. There was no better sleeping-place when the skies were cloudless. But she did not sleep; and there was nothing in her heart of the cool gaiety that had mocked the satyr. *If they had seen*—she thought. *If they had seen.*

CHARLTON stood with his rifle raised to his shoulder. He hesitated to shoot. The girl had escaped. The matter was not really his business. There was a half-human quality about the creature before him which his mind allowed as he watched it.

He supposed that the satyr knew nothing of rifles, and this mistake was his undoing. It knew its danger perfectly well. It had seen others of its kind shot down, and the executioners had been unmannerly enough to hang the disembowelled bodies where those that lived could observe them.

The satyr looked at the rifle, and its fear was abject. It did not attempt flight, because it knew that it would be useless. But the shot delayed, and a wild impulse of resistance waked in its frightened mind. Charlton, seeing the terror which he inspired, expected it to turn and run.

Instead of that, it ducked suddenly and ran in under the rifle. It was about six paces distant when it did this. Charlton lost half a second from sheer surprise, and when he brought the rifle down, the beast was immediately beneath it. He shot it through the loins, the muzzle almost touching the hairy skin. At the same instant the butting horns caught him. He felt a sharp pain in his left thigh, as he drew back from the creature, which had collapsed on the path. He looked down, and saw that he was bleeding freely.

The satyr (he was sure that it was a satyr now) rose on its hands, and dragged

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itself under the bushes, its hind legs trailing.

Charlton knew that the ground rocked beneath him. His leg was failing. He must not faint, he told himself, till he had stopped the bleeding. *He must not.* He was back in the bushes now. It was bleeding fast, but he was satisfied that the main artery was untouched. The wound was about three inches above the knee. He tied a piece of string tightly round the leg, immediately above it. It was the best he could do. Then he lost consciousness.

Under the bushes on the other side of the path lay the satyr. They had both returned to the places from which they had watched the water. Fate laughed, and the forest resumed its peace.

During the night Charlton regained consciousness. But he could not think clearly. He had been dreaming of a girl who stood about to bathe at the lakeside in a tropic forest. A delightful scene, but not such as is familiar to the waking mind. His dream was mixed with wild imaginings of satyrs, horned and hoofed, which he knew did not exist. He was not too sane to believe it, but the dream was very real. When he tried to think of where he really was, his mind failed and wandered. He remembered that he had planned to explore the forest tomorrow. But what were the branches overhead tonight, and the star that showed where they parted? He must be dreaming still. He wished he could return into the dream entirely. But his mind wandered. Why did she not turn her head? It was always so with dreams. Anyway, he was tired now. He would sleep.

But the girl did not sleep—because she was not sure. There are few griefs or terrors which can resist sleep in its due season. A murderer can sleep, though he know that he will be hanged in the morning. But not if he be in doubt whether he will wake to death or a pardon.

She had lived safely for two years. She knew that they believed her dead. She was safe in the trees. Doubly so since she had made friends of the little monkeys, who could warn her while they were a mile away. But, anyway, they came only to hunt the satyrs, and that only once in every moon.

But if they had seen. And *they must* have seen, or who should have cried to warn her? And yet— There was something strange. The time—the place—the voice—she was not satisfied, though her reason told her that there was only one explanation, and her fear confirmed it. No less, she resolved to go back to the spot when the morning came. Reason told her that she should be as far from it as possible.

She had a range of just about ten miles of forest. About ten square miles of trees that grew so close that you could go all the way through the green cover without sight of earth or sky. Surely she could defy them to find her! And with the little monkeys to warn her. But she knew that she would be hunted—hunted—and there could be but one end to the two years she had lived in the forest.

THE satyr was dead. He lay face downward, as he had crawled under the bushes.

The sudden tropic sun had not risen, and the westward stars still showed in the reluctant sky when the branches moved and the girl dropped lightly to the ground beside him.

She had no doubt that he was dead, though she kicked a shaggy side with her foot to prove it. Cold and stiff. There was no doubt there. But having shot him, why had they left him thus? They hunted for food. He could not have escaped their notice so easily. He had not gone twenty yards from the spot where he must have been shot. And he had left a trail of blood as he moved. She traced it backward. There was a mystery here, and it was vital to her to solve it.

On the open path she could see where he had fallen. The light was still dim, but her eyes were keen, and she saw that there was another trail of blood which went the opposite way. Swift as a startled bird she regained the branches, and was high in the forest roof before she would pause to consider it. She did not know what it could mean, and she had learned the forest law of the forest life: that what is not understood is to be avoided swiftly. She had descended dangerously to obtain knowledge, as a bird will swoop to snatch the food it needs, but she would consider it in safety.

She considered, and found it inexplicable. There had been only one shot. Possibly it might have hit two of the satyrs, and in following one they might have lost the other. It was possible—but unconvincing. And there was the cry that had warned her. Besides, they did not hunt singly, nor, in her experience, had they done so at such a distance when the light was failing. She was sure that there was something here which she had not dis-

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covered, and which she must know for her peace of mind, if not for her safety.

Very cautiously she descended again. Among the trees that met overhead, she crossed to the other side of the path. Then she descended to the lower branches. She found Charlton easily. After the first restless hours he had fallen into an easier sleep, and the movements in the boughs above did not disturb him. She watched him for some time, and when assured that he slept, she dropped silently to the ground.

Her feet made no sound on the soft verdure as she approached. She bent over him, looking at the wound. She did not think it serious. A very cool and tearless Aphrodite, she considered an Adonis who would not die. At least, he would not die of that wound. There were other possibilities. She saw that he was a stranger who had doubtless been cast upon the island, as had herself and her friends. He might be alone. If so, he would not live long were he discovered. He must be warned. Also, he knew of her existence, and if he were caught, he might tell it, thinking no evil. For every reason he must be warned. She looked searchingly at the sleeping face. Was there a possibility that a road of escape was opening? Or that here was a companion for her loneliness?

Her eyes sought every detail of his equipment for guidance. She learned that he had come through the bog. That meant, almost certainly, that he knew nothing of the dangers which threatened him. But she must not risk anything till she were surer. And, in any case, he must not see her like—this.

Quietly, as though her thoughts had penetrated to his sleeping mind, he waked, and their glances met for an instant. Startled into full wakefulness by the apparition, he raised himself and looked round, but there was no one in view. He was not sure that the delirium of the night had left him.

Then the pain of his wounded leg gave him a more urgent consideration. The horn had ripped the muscle for an inch or two, but he did not think it had gone deeply. It was less serious than he had thought, though it had bled so freely. But his leg was numb from the way in which he had tied it. With some difficulty he cut the string, and the blood forced its way back into the deserted veins. The wound did not break out again, but he was afraid that it might do so should he attempt to walk. Yet drink he must. His thirst was maddening. He crawled down to the water.

Having drunk, he washed and bandaged the wound. He went back into the bushes. Not wishing to meet the satyrs again in his present condition, he withdrew further from the path. He still had some food; and the night having been warm and dry, he was little the worse for his exposure. The curse of the mosquito had not fallen on this lonely island. He would rest today and hope that he should be able to proceed quietly tomorrow. He had seen nothing yet that he need fear. The satyrs were not formidable. He realized that he had been attacked from desperation rather than courage or ferocity. But the vision of the night before would not leave him. He was determined to find her.

He drowsed as the day advanced, though with a mind alert for any sound that might rouse him, and with the rifle near to his hand. He did not think that he had slept heavily, and was surprised to find that a large bunch of grapes, a pile of guava-fruit, and a red variety of banana were beside him.

THE fruit was welcome in the heat of the afternoon, relieving thirst and hunger; but it meant more than that. It was an evidence that he was watched over, and by those who were not unfriendly. Perhaps he could take the gift as no more than recompense for a warning cry.

He remembered that he had not seen the girl's face. The waking glimpse had been too vague and transient for any enduring impression to be left on his mind, though he sought it vainly. His heart beat faster as he recalled the vision in the tropic twilight of the previous day. Certainly he would find her.

Night came, and it was very dark in the forest. Having rested during the day, Charlton now felt sleep to be impossible. His mind besieged the problems that the island offered, but found no point at which he could penetrate to their solution.

While he wondered a voice called low and near through the silence, *"Dormez vous?"* He was uncertain of the direction from which it came. There was a rustling in the leaves above him, but that might be the monkeys. He answered in English: "No, who are you?"

"I thought you were," came the cryptic answer.

"Si vous—if you mean I'm English," he answered, "you're right, but I can speak your language if you prefer."

"Oh, they're both mine," the voice an-

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swered, "and I've forgotten them about equally. We'd better keep to yours. But I'll tell you who I am, if you'll lead the way."

"Well, I asked first," he said, not unreasonably.

"But I'm a girl, and can't wait."

"Are you the one that escaped from the beast I shot?"

"I may be; but I shan't speak again till—"

"Very well," he said, resigning himself to the unavoidable. "But there's nothing to tell. My name's Charlton Foyle. My age is twenty-six. My height, five feet ten inches. My weight varies. My profession is (or was) that of a junior attaché. The doctors say I am ill, and I thought they were right; but I am beginning to doubt it. I drifted here in a boat that I was too weak or too stupid to handle. That's the whole tale, and now will you please explain—everything?"

"*You have a boat?*" the question came breathlessly. "Where is it?"

"I'll tell you if you'll play fair. You haven't answered my question."

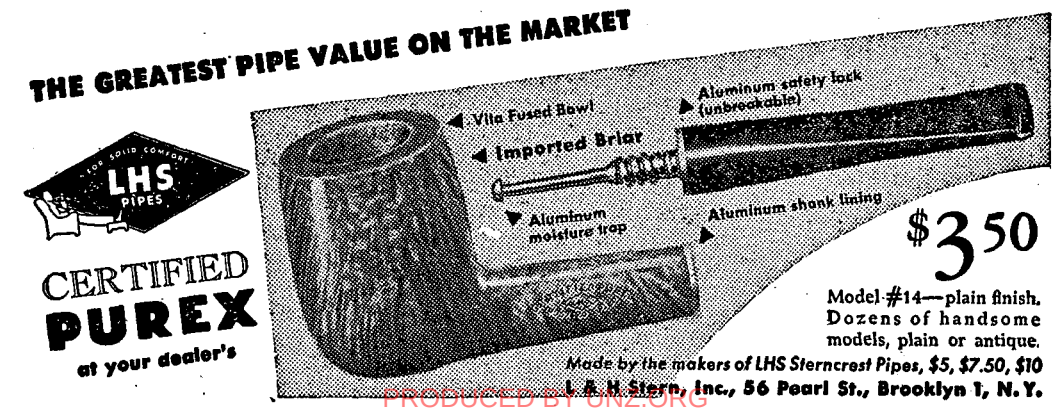
"There's really nothing to tell," the voice mocked him. "My name's Marcelle Latour. My age is twenty. My height is five feet six. My weight varies. My profession is difficult to define. The doctors might have said I was ill had there been any to consult, and had I asked their opinions. I drifted here on a raft that I made no attempt to handle, as I was both too weak and too stupid. Also, there were others with me who were more competent. That's the whole tale, and now will you please explain—*where is* the boat?"

"The boat's quite real," he answered, "and quite safe." His mind was divided between a reasonable caution and an instinctive confidence. "But it is too large for one man to handle. If your companions are anxious to leave the island, we might do so together."

The voice that answered had a new note of seriousness. "I have no companions. They are dead. I am quite alone. No one knew that I was alive, till you saw me. But if you have a boat, it may be life for both of us, if you will take me. I must tell you all, and you will understand when you hear. But if you don't believe me, please say, and I'll stop. I don't suppose you will. But you may, because you've seen something—" She hesitated, as though hardly knowing how to commence. Memories crowded back as her mind turned to the past. Charlton had leisure to wonder how near she was, and to recall the vision which his mind held, so that he hardly heard the first words in which she began her narrative.

"It was two or three years ago—I can't say more exactly—that I was traveling home with my father—he was French, but my mother was English. He had been on a scientific mission to the French islands in Polynesia on behalf of the government. We were run down by another ship in the night. When the morning came it had sunk, or was out of sight—I don't know which. They said it was damaged more than we were. Anyway, we were sinking. Some of our boats were smashed, and most of the men went off in two of the others. The captain and four of the men stayed. He advised us not to go with the boats. He thought the ship could be kept afloat, and that the risk was greater if we left it. The weather was very rough.

"But the ship sank during the next day, though not till the men had made a large raft, for the only boat we had left was a very small one. They said the raft would be safer. They made it with a mast and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sail. It was large and strong, and floated high on the water. We had loaded the boat with provisions and towed it behind us. It was better weather by then.

"I don't think I was very frightened. The ship went down so gently that the raft floated clear of the deck before it really sank. But the weather got worse again, and the rope broke, so we lost the boat. We were on the raft for about three weeks. The last week we had water, but no food. We caught fish, and one of them must have been poisonous, for the captain and one of the men died. It was a horrible time.

"Then we saw this island. We thought we were saved at first, but when we got near, it was all high cliffs with no landing-place. We sailed too close in, and were beaten against the cliff, and one of the men was drowned, and the raft was damaged. We were too weak to do much to save him. Then we found a kind of tunnel in the cliff. There was a ledge along the side on which we landed—"

"Yes, I know the cave," Charlton said, "you needn't explain that."

"Very well," she answered. "If it's the same. Anyway, that's how we got here. We saved a few things, but couldn't get the raft properly in, and it went out to sea when the tide turned. Most of our things went with it.

"We climbed up some steps of a kind—you know them?—and lived for weeks in the rooms above. We hauled up the two chests we had saved—"

"Two," he said. "I only saw one."

"There were two chests," she said, "but they don't matter. We were very weak, and we had no food. We found a way out on the inner face of the cliff. It goes all round the island like the sides of a cup. Perhaps you know the way we found? Very well. We all felt afraid, but Pierre Janot ventured out and he came back the next day with plenty of fruit, but with a tale that he had nearly died in a bog, and of such strange creatures that we were more afraid than before."

MARCELLE paused for a moment, as though doubtful how to continue—or reluctant to explain all that had happened—and then said, "I must tell you about these men. Jean Couteau was quite harmless. He was like a dog that is faithful, but too timid to be of any use to help you in danger. He had religion. He trembled at the tales that Pierre told us. He thought that we were on an island of devils—he wasn't far wrong in that.

"The things Pierre told impressed my father very differently. He was interested, and questioned him closely. But he didn't like Pierre, and he was absorbed for these first days in examining the drawings and other things in the upper rooms—"

"The upper rooms?" Charlton interrupted.

"Yes—haven't you seen them? That is where he had the chest taken that held his papers. Well, it doesn't matter.

"But after a time Pierre's tale changed. He said that he had found the people who really controlled the island, and that they were quiet and friendly. Why should he spend his time bringing us food by such a path, while we could get it ourselves in safety?

"We should have had to venture out ourselves, had he refused to do it. He said he hadn't told them where we were hidden, out of respect for my father's wish, but that he should not return again unless one of us would go with him. When he said this my father was not with us. I did not want to go alone with him. There were reasons. But I was very tired of the caves, and I wanted the forest. Also, I thought that, if he did not return, it would be useful for one of us to know the way he had found for crossing the bog.

"He said that I could be back within a few hours if I wished. I was not really much afraid of him. Anyway, I went.

"I had made Jean promise not to tell my father till I returned, but he was frightened and did so almost as soon as we had started. My father followed. He kept us in sight, though we did not see him.

"Pierre led us to the people who live at the end of the island. It's no use telling you about them. No one would believe who has not seen them. They are not beasts. They are men—of a kind.

"He led us by an indirect way, so that we entered their village from the further side, and they were between us and the nearest way of retreat when first we saw them.

"They were crowding round us in a moment. They must have known we were coming. They talked in a language which is difficult to understand, but which has many English words. I think they would have pulled me to pieces out of a kind of savage curiosity—I am sure they would have torn my clothes off me—"

Marcelle stopped suddenly, as though the allusion brought a sudden self-consciousness of the present, but resumed in a moment.

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"Pierre shouted to them a warning about 'Demers,' at which they seemed to hesitate, and it was just then that my father joined us. They seemed half frightened of my father, and drew back a few steps. There must have been fifty of them, men and women and some half-grown ones. You couldn't think of them as children. It was like being awake in a nightmare.

"Only my father being there gave me some confidence. He was never afraid of anything. I saw him looking at them as aloofly as though they were a new species for him to classify. They felt it somehow, and hung back like a lot of cowardly wolves, each afraid to be the first to spring at us.

"Then there was a cry that Demers was coming, and—well, I can't tell you what he is"—Charlton heard the shudder in her voice as she named him—"he's the son of the old man who rules them.

"He took us to him, in a white stone hall that those creatures could not have built. My father talked to me in French, which they could not understand. 'I don't think they are cannibals,' he said, rather doubtfully, 'but in any case we shall know how to deal with them. They have no intelligence.' He asked me to interpret what they said, as far as I could understand it. He could write English well, but not follow it when spoken, as I do, and they did not speak any proper language at all.

"The old man is called Jacob. Even my father would not say that he has no intelligence. When we talked to him, we soon knew that Pierre had betrayed us. I don't know why he did it, unless it were out of revenge because I had shown I disliked him. You might understand if you knew him. He is still with them. But, of course, he does not know that I am alive.

"We found that I was to be a wife for Demers, and I should have been handed over to him without ceremony as soon as Jacob had seen me, but for my father's contrivance.

"He did not try to speak to them himself. He told me to tell them that he could not speak their language. That gave us time to consult, and to exchange words in French which they could not follow.

"My father told me not to look frightened, as there was nothing to fear. I was to tell Jacob that I was quite willing and that he approved, but that there was a prophecy that, if I were married on any day except when the moon was full, my husband would die within a week. It was the kind of idea which would come to my father's mind, and we must have acted well, for they believed us at once. It was four days before the moon would be full.

"PIERRE could not have believed the tale of the prophecy, but my father told him that he had considered that, as there was no means of escaping, it was the best thing that could happen that I should be married to the son of the chief man of the island. Pierre seemed puzzled and sullen, but our manner may have convinced him. As soon as we were alone, my father told me not to be afraid. 'Of course,' he said, 'I shall not let that ape touch you. But we have four days. For the next three days don't even think of escaping from them. Just forget the future. I shall be ready with a plan when the time comes. Meanwhile, I want to gain their confidence and look round and learn what I can.'

"My father was like that. Nothing worried him needlessly. He was always sure he could deal with it, and I had learned to trust him. And for the next three days he seemed absorbed in the strange things that were around us. I think, had he really been in the hands of cannibals, he would have been capable of forgetting his coming fate, had he been interested in the shape of the pot which they put on to boil for the coming meal.

"They gave us each a hut, and while within these we were quite free, and more or less private; and they followed us about so that to escape unnoticed would have been impossible. We might have tried it in the night, but I knew my father was planning better than I could do, and I just did as he told me.

"It is a wonderful place, like a great garden. But the gardeners are huge birds, taller than men. They call them rukas."

"Birds?" Charlton's voice was incredulous.

"Yes, I knew you wouldn't believe without seeing. But they don't belong to the people of whom I am telling you. Beyond them there is a great red temple, where there are others of a different kind. We learned that they reserved part of the cultivated land to themselves, and we were warned not to enter it. But the great birds go where they will. They are like ostriches, but larger—and different.

"My father said they were a kind of giant cassowary, till he looked at their feet. He smiled when I spoke of ostriches, and asked whether I did not know that those birds had only two toes. But when he looked at their feet he said they were dif-

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ferent from cassowaries, but they were more like them than the rhea. They looked down at us in a way I didn't like. It was as though we amused them. But they did us no harm. There were other strange things, but it's not easy to tell them. It would have been beautiful, but for the horror.

"On the second day they took us with them to hunt a satyr which they wished to kill for the wedding feast. I needn't describe that. It made us realize the kind of beasts that had caught us, more than we had done before. I've watched many others since, but it was new then. Of course, we all eat things that are killed—at least, I used to; I haven't here; and we may enjoy chasing them, but it was the way they killed it after it was caught—one of them shot it and broke its leg—the way they gloated over killing it, and crowded to see and share, that was so loathsome—I can't describe it."

"Shot it?" Charlton interrupted again. "I thought you said that they were only half-human, and I supposed this island to be unknown to Europeans. Have they got firearms?"

"They have got some muzzle-loading muskets, and large clumsy pistols. My father said they were half a century old—and a whole lot of swords and other weapons. Didn't I tell you they spoke in a half-English language? They say their ancestors came here in an English ship. But they're not English now—they don't seem quite human. You need to see them to understand."

"Well, go on. I'm sorry I interrupted."

"There isn't very much more to tell, and the time's passing. I must go soon," Marcelle answered. She knew the hour of moon-rising, and had no intention of being seen when its light should flood the glades of the forest, and give a glimmering twilight to its recesses. "The boundary between the gardens (which are like a great park with lawns and fruits and flowering trees and creepers) and the forest in which we are is a high palisade, too strong to break through easily, even should any creature wish (the satyrs would never dare the attempt), but there is nothing more than an open pathway leading to a gate in the palisade to divide the gardens between the two races that share them. My father was bent on seeing the temple, and he may have thought that we should find some protection among people who were apparently respected by our captors. He told me of his intentions, and asked me whether I should prefer the risk of going with him or remaining. I chose to go.

"So on the third day we just walked over the boundary. They cried out in anger or alarm—there were a dozen of them around us at the time, but the movement was unexpected and they did not dare to follow. They kept shouting to us to return, till a drop in the ground hid us, but we took no notice.

"We went on for a mile or more in absolute solitude, getting quite near to the temple. It is neither beautiful nor ugly, except as strength is beautiful. It gives an impression of being immovable, though the world should fall from beneath it. It is very squarely built and of great size, but the strangest thing is its color, which is red, but of a very deep, almost purple tinge, and of an extraordinary intensity, so that you feel that it is not merely on the surface, but all through the great square stones that build it. You feel that it is soaked in this color. I remember that I felt awe as I looked, and a more sinister impression, which I could neither shake off nor explain.

"AS WE looked, a priest came from the temple towards us. He was tall and dark, of a quite different race and character from those among whom we had been. He looked at us in a remote, austere way, but without hostility. When he spoke, I was startled to hear him use the language to which I was becoming accustomed. He must have learned it from them, but, as he spoke it, it had lost its vulgarity. He did not rebuke us for trespass, he simply told me to stay where I was and await my father's return. He signaled with his hand to one of the rukas that was near us, and it came and waited beside me. My father went with him. It was near twilight when he returned.

"We had walked most of the way back before he spoke, and then he was different from anything which I had known previously. He was always cool and sufficient, but he spoke now very slowly and with an unusual gravity. He told me that the priest had shown him strange things, but he could not repeat them. He said, 'I have seen what is going to happen during the next days, and some things that are further. I want you to remember that if you have courage all will be well.'

"I said, 'Will it be well for you also?' and, as he did not answer quickly, I continued, 'But if you have been warned of any danger, surely we can find some way

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to avoid it.' I had a fear that some tragedy was upon us from the tone in which he spoke, and a restraint that was different from his usual serenity.

"He answered, 'Yes, we could alter it. No one can really foresee the future, because it is subject to incalculable influences. It is not fixed beforehand. But—I think I have seen what will happen—if we make no move to avert it: and if we do that there may be a worse alternative. That is the danger. Against that the priest warned me before I looked. If I should tell you, it would not happen, and you would only think that I have been credulous of folly. In any case it may not. Many chances may avert it. But it might be worse.'

"After that he would say no more for some time, and then he turned to me and said, 'I want you to promise that you will never consort with this *canaille*, whatever happens. Anything would be better than that. You must have patience as well as courage.'

"I could not understand that then, though I gave the promise he asked, but those words have shown me since that he really must have seen, and that he gave up his own life because he saw that it would mean escape for me if he let things happen in that way.

"There was great excitement over our return, and an increased suspicion and watchfulness. I was questioned as to our experiences and replied on my father's advice that I had not gone far, and had seen nothing. I did not mention that he had been in the temple separately.

"The next day Pierre came to us with a proposal that we should escape together. We had good reason to distrust him, and my father replied that he saw no hope in escape, and had no intention of doing anything of the kind.

"A great feast was held once every month in the great hall on the night following that on which they hunted the satyrs, and it was their custom to have a kind of dancing orgy after this feast, which would fall on that occasion upon the day my father had mentioned, when the moon was full.

"My father told me to say that he would marry me to Demers at the conclusion of this feast, if he could have a house built for his own use, and if it were agreed that I should become Demers' legal wife.

"My father insisted upon making some other conditions—I needn't trouble to tell them—but, while they were not difficult to grant, they gave an impression that we were quite agreed to the marriage, which was no doubt what he actually intended.

"Anyway, I don't think they had any suspicion.

"My father told me his plan, which was so simple that I was afraid at first, till I saw that he was right, and that its unexpectedness would be its strength. He said that, as the evening passed, they would all get more or less drunk, and that he would give me an agreed signal, either while the feast should still be in progress, or even on the way to Demers' house afterwards, at which we should quietly escape among the trees by a path that we agreed upon, and which we both memorized very carefully.

"He pointed out that they would be more or less unarmed and taken by surprise, even though they might still have control of their wits and legs, which he thought unlikely.

"He had a good revolver which he always carried, though he was not in the habit of showing it, and I doubt whether even Pierre knew of its existence.

"He said that we could easily outdistance a scattered pursuit as we should have a clear objective, and that, when we reached the caves, we could defend the entrance, should they follow and find it. I said that Pierre would betray that, to which he answered that he would deal with him, but he did not say how. I think they must have known more or less of the caves, as their ancestors appear to have come by the same way, but they may have forgotten them, or somehow lost knowledge of the entrance.

"MY FATHER told me all this with evident confidence that the plan was sufficient in itself, but yet as though it were of no real importance one way or other, and his mind was preoccupied with something of a greater significance, but he said no more.

"I think it would have all gone as he had planned, but, when the feast had just started, and we were all seated at the table, Jean Couteau came running into the hall.

"The old man Jacob and his son were at the head of the table, and we were at his right hand, the priest and his wife—I suppose they were guests to honor the occasion—being opposite to us. I had seen my father and the priest exchange glances, and look towards the entrance of the hall,

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which was at the further end, more than once, as though they were expecting something to happen. When Jean appeared I heard my father say to himself, *'Donc c'etait vrai?'* and then very quietly to me, 'Come at once; it is now or never.'

"Jean ran into the hall crying something about hell and devils, and waving his arms —I think he was quite mad—and at once the whole hall was full of screams and outcry. They are a people that can be roused to a frenzy of cruelty or excitement in a moment. It is the same when they hunt the satyrs. They sprang at Jean as though they would tear him to pieces with their hands. Some of them wore cutlasses —they have a lot of old ship's weapons— and they drew them and slashed at him while he dodged wildly about the hall. I don't know why his coming made my father decide that we must go at once, but we could have done nothing to save him. The way he screamed was like putting a match to a laid fire. I saw him killed before we were down the hall.

"We rose so quietly, and the attention of everyone was so much taken by what was happening at the further end of the hall, that we were half-way down it before any effort was made to intercept us. I looked back once and saw the priest watching the confusion as one who looks at a play which does not concern him. Then I caught the old man's eye, and knew he had seen us. His son had half risen, and he was holding him back with one hand, and saying something to him very urgently. I think he saw the revolver in my father's hand.

"Then he shouted something which I could not hear, and at once attention was directed toward us. We were walking down the side of the hall. I was nearer the wall, with my father on my left, and the backs of the people—men and women seated together—were at his left side. They turned and saw us, and began to jump up to stop us. My father quickened his pace. He did not fire, though one or two of them drew their cutlasses as they turned, and thrust at him as he passed them, but, as we were near the entrance, a man sprang in front of him and seized me by the arm. I shall never forget his face.

"He pulled me in front of my father, and I struck at him with my free arm. He screamed out something—for the others to help, I think—as he did so, and I think I screamed in a different way. It must have been a wild scene. I think my father was the only one there, besides the priest, who kept his self control. I saw the man's black eyes, mad with excitement, and his teeth, very white, and snarling like a wolf, and then my father fired over my shoulder, and the face fell.

"The next moment we were clear of the hall, and running hard for the way we had chosen.

"We could not reach it. They were close behind and around us. Some of them could run faster than we. But they were afraid to come close. My father fired if they did, aiming deliberately. I don't think a shot missed. So we gained the trees and a moment's safety, but we were cut off from the way we had intended—the safe way back across the bog. In the shelter of the trees my father stopped a moment to reload. Then I noticed that his left arm was bleeding. I asked if we could not wait to bandage it, but he said no—it was nothing—and hurried me on. 'It's not the arm that matters, it's the side,' he said, and I saw that he had been wounded there also. It must have been before we got clear of the hall, when they were thrusting at him with their cutlasses. I don't know how deep it was: I suppose he knew that it would make no difference in the end.

"We came out of the wood to an open space that sloped down to the bog. It was open water in places, and smooth green mud in others, and there were great patches of reeds with gaudy blue flowers striped in mauve and crimson.

"They were close behind us then, and closing in on either hand. They drove us down to the bog. We crossed it for some distance, walking heavily, but not sinking. They seemed afraid to follow. We made for what seemed like an island of reeds, but, when we were near it, we found a clear space of water about twelve feet across which separated us from it. My father said, 'You can swim better than I. Could you swim round to the further side and see whether we could land there? Slip into the water as though you were sinking in the bog.'

"I was afraid, but I did not like to refuse. I was used to obeying him. I did not understand his purpose. I slipped down as he said, and swam low till I was out of sight of those who were pursuing us. Then I climbed into the reeds. I pushed through cautiously till I came to where my father was still standing, but he had sunk to his boot-tops in the thick mud. I called to him cautiously that there was a safe way round, but he answered without turning to me that he had a different plan. He was drawing his feet out of the mud with some difficulty as he did so.

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"HE SPOKE again without looking toward me, 'Make for the forest; it will be safer than the caves. Do not answer.' Some of our pursuers were following doubtfully a little way into the bog, and my father fired again, and one of them fell into it. The other tried to drag him out, but found they were being drawn in and let him go. They were all watching him sink, and could not control their excitement as he screamed to them to rescue him.

"They broke into a kind of nervous laughter. They seemed to be frightened, and yet to enjoy watching him. It held my attention till he disappeared, and then I saw that my father had moved some distance away, as though he were making for another patch of reeds. Then I saw that three men were running down to the edge of the bog with muskets. They fired at him all at once, and he fired back twice. I didn't think they had hit him. I saw one of the men had dropped his musket, and that he was holding both hands to his body.

"When I looked for my father again, he had disappeared. I never saw him again. He may have been hit, or he may have sunk in the bog. I lay still. I was too frightened to move. There was a crowd at the edge of the bog by this time. The old man and his son were with them. They were all talking and pointing. I suppose they thought I had sunk. I don't think any of them would have been brave enough to come to search after watching the one that sank.

"They went at last. It was sunset. I lay there too frightened and too wretched to move, till the moon was high in the sky. The night was as cold as they ever are on this island, and I must have been drenched by the swim, but I did not notice. It was the coming of a snake that started me. It swam through the clear water with its head raised in the moonlight. I dreaded snakes then more than anything else that lives. I know now that it would not have harmed me.

"As it came out of the water and began to crawl through the reeds, I started up, and plunged blindly into the water to escape it. I made straight for the land, taking the bog as it came. It is a marvel that I got there alive. Perhaps my speed helped me. I ran so quickly over the surface that my feet had no time to sink. As I ran, I remembered my father's words, and I made for the forest. No one stopped me: no one could have seen me, for no search was made. I have lived here in the trees ever since—I am very glad you have come."

Charlton was silent for a moment when the voice ceased, pondering over the strangeness of the tale; and it spoke again with a hesitation which it had not previously held. "But I don't expect you to believe me. You will have to see for yourself first; and then it may be too late to escape. I know it sounds an unlikely tale, and I haven't told you all, because I didn't want you to doubt it."

The tone was almost plaintive now, and Charlton answered quickly, "Oh yes, I believe you. It's not the kind of tale that anyone would expect to be believed if it weren't true. Besides, I know it's true about the caves, and I've seen the satyrs. It's a bit stiff about the birds doing the garden, but, after all, elephants do similar work in India, so it's not very surprising.

"But there's one thing that puzzles me. Why didn't you go back to the cave to get the things you had left there? Clothes and things, you know. You must have needed them."

"I was afraid at first. I went to the further side of the forest and hid in the trees. I was afraid of being found."

Charlton fell silent again, then. A sudden doubt had disturbed him. Could *he* find the entrance to the cave? He thought he could, but he realized for the first time how small it was, and without outward sign in the monotony of the creepered wall. But he must face that stile when he reached it.

"Can we hope to escape?" she said eagerly. "Will you tell me about yourself?"

"Well, I think we'll try," he answered with a new cheerfulness. "If you can help me to handle a boat, we ought to be able to manage it. About myself? There's nothing really to tell."

But she pressed him, and he told her many things of his own life and of happenings in the world from which she had been divided, realizing as he did so that she had the livelier interest in them. He had had life within his grasp, and had let it go indifferently past—while she had hungered for it with a vivid vitality, thinking that she had lost it forever.

They talked, and the night passed. They drew to a closer mental intimacy than might have come from months of more conventional acquaintance. He had been telling her of the capacity of his boat, and they had been planning to escape together with the impersonal comradeship of a common need.

While he was speaking she had resolved

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to go before the dawn should come, and she was the more urgent to do so for the mental intimacy which had united them.

Also, she had a certain task to accomplish before the day came, of which she was afraid to think, though she was resolute to achieve it.

She spoke at last, trying to reach a casual tone.

"Listen carefully to this. There's a tree on the further side of the pool with low boughs, and dark leaves, long and narrow. It's the only one of its kind just here, though they're common round the swampy places. It's quite easy to climb. There's a space where the branches spread out at the top of the trunk, where you can rest comfortably and would be safe forever. I'll come back about three hours before noon. Will you wait for me there? I shall come through the higher trees and drop down. If I don't come, you'll know that they've—that I can't—but I've no doubt I shall come."

"But why need you go? Why can't I come with you? Can't I help?" Charlton began, a score of questions and protests rising in his mind to delay her, but Marcelle had seen the dim outline of the tree beside her, and it was a high and distant voice that called a final farewell to his protests.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE TEMPLE OF GIR

MARCELLE earnestly desired apparel before she should introduce herself in the daylight. It was about eighteen months since the last rag of the attractive garments in which she had landed had declined to identify itself with her further wanderings. Recalling the expedient of her first ancestor, she had endeavored to provide herself with a covering of leaves. After some weeks of experiment, she remembered that Eve had received supernatural assistance, and she decided that it must have been needed.

Her efforts to manufacture garments for various parts of her person had succeeded in providing several which she could put on without catastrophe. When she assumed one of these, it remained in its intended position so long as she practiced a similar immobility. When she moved, it could be relied upon to expose its own fragility, and its owner's person.

If the second branch did not reproduce her original nudity, it was only because the first had relieved it of the opportunity.

After some weeks of these abortive experiments, she had desisted. While she had been engaged upon them, she had been able to look forward to a time when she would have resumed the symbols of respectability, as she had been taught to suppose them.

Probably there are women who would have been more persistent, more inventive, and more adroit in manipulation, but she had never been fond of sewing.

She had no doubt that she could pass the palisade, though the hoofed satyrs were unable. But she did not know with exactness what might be at any point upon the further side. She knew of more than one place where the trees grew close and high, and mingled with those beyond —places where the little monkeys crossed with impunity. She marshaled every scrap of memory regarding the position of woods and gardens; adding everything that the distant observations of the last two years had taught her. She thought of the wide gate in the palisade through which they entered the forest when they came to hunt the satyrs. There was a path from there that led, broad and straight, to the center of the settlement. She had not passed along it, but she knew it at either end. The trees ran along one side of it for some distance from the forest. Perhaps, most of the way. She decided upon that line of approach. When the trees failed, she would take the path. She would make the quicker progress in the darkness, and the path would be almost certainly deserted. She must risk that, and trust to speed for her escape, if she should be seen.

As she planned, she did. The moon had risen now, and was sufficient to guide her. She would have asked for less light, had the choice been hers. She crossed above the barrier without difficulty, and continued for nearly a mile, passing from tree to tree beside the moonlit path. It would have been easier to descend and walk along it, but there was a feeling of security in her accustomed trees which she would not willingly lose. The path was empty of life. The movements that she heard around and beneath her were only such as were common to the tropic night. They held no threat of danger, but rather an assurance of security. They told of myriad activities that would have sunk into an instant silence had any voice or sound of distant step disturbed them.

But they did not cease as she passed, for she was free of the forest, and danger did not come from the high branches in which she lived.

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So far, the little monkey that she had tended had followed, its agility and untroubled leaps through the empty air enabling it to follow her longer reach and almost equal tree-craft.

Still she went on, and the moon rose higher and the path was vacant, though a yellow owl came drifting, silent as a dead leaf, along the air-way above it.

Then there came a tiny sound from the monkey, and the girl paused in an instant, for she knew the danger-word of its kind, which would pass, low as a movement of leaves, from end to end of the whole forest.

She became aware of some large shadowy shapes among the branches before her. Marcelle's heart beat fast as she saw them. She guessed at once that they were the great birds which the older community kept for their gardening. She had never thought of them as flying. Probably they ascended branch by branch, as a fowl will gain the higher perch of the poultry-house. But here they were, a hundred feet from the ground. She was afraid to go forward.

She moved, and they gave their first sign of having observed her. A hoarse squawking noise broke out. It was taken up by birds further away. It seemed that scores of these creatures must be perched in the trees before her.

She had no defense, should they attack her. She remembered their great beaks; their heads, which were higher than hers; and the sardonic intelligence of the eyes that had surveyed her as she had walked in the gardens. She had always dreaded them.

Certainly she could not now bring herself to venture among them. And there was a new danger in the noise which they were making. It might raise an alarm which would be fatal. And the time was passing.

She could not attempt another way through the trees, for they grew thickly only in a narrow belt along the roadside. There were trees on all sides, but they were separated too widely for any continued progress among them.

She must descend and take to the ground.

As she decided this, the little monkey called from below her. Fifty feet down, she found that the way was clear. The birds were only perched among the higher branches. She went forward quietly, though with an added caution. The squawking voices had stilled, as she left the higher level.

THE trees grew smaller, and then ceased. Marcelle stood on the moonlit road. She was afraid to go on, dreading the peril of the adventure, and feeling a disconcerting sense of bareness, such as she had never known in the green depths of the forest.

There was little cover before her. To the right the ground rose park-like and undulating, colorless in the moonlight, but Marcelle knew it to be gay with the tamed luxuriance of a million flowers. Beyond was the dark mass of the temple, and the houses of the priests and their families. Before her, on the hilltop, rose the white feast-house, and to the left a bush-clad slope that fell away to the bog-land. She remembered the bushes, with their great blooms of tiger-yellow, shaped like a slender trumpet that lifted sunward when the light called, and then declined again as the evening shadowed. Beyond these bushes were the white men's houses.

She had been uncertain whether to attempt her purpose there, or at the dwellings of the older people, but the bushes decided her. She could crawl through them unnoticed. Also, she was more doubtful of the habits of the dark-skinned women. She did not know how or where they slept, or—in fact, anything. She knew nothing of their habits, nor had she entered their quarters. She turned to the left.

Crawling through the bushes was possible. So far, she had been right; but it was neither pleasant nor speedy. It was necessary to lie low—very low at times. Necessary to wriggle flatly along ground that was stony in some places, and at others consisted of a damp adhesive clay with rough-barked leafless under-boughs scraping the back—boughs with an occasional projecting spike that gave a sharp penalty for too impetuous progress. It was hard, slow, uncomfortable work, and, worse than that, it was almost impossible to continue in a straight course in the root-impeded darkness. There was a heavy poisonous odor from the over-closing bushes, which made breathing difficult and the brain rebellious.

Having wasted half an hour, and made less progress than she could have done in five minutes on the open way, Marcelle gave up the attempt. She realized the time was passing inexorably, and that it threatened a greater danger than was probable from the open path in the night-time.

Standing erect once more, with trodden ground beneath her, she saw how high

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the moon stood, and calculated that the dawn was not more than two hours away. Men do not lie asleep after dawn in latitudes where day and night are equal, and noon is sultry.

She had a cowardly impulse to turn back, and to come earlier and more swiftly on another night, aided by what she had learned already. Perhaps it was no more than prudence that urged her, but, because she was in a panic of fear, she felt it to be cowardice, and refused the thought. She went on more rapidly. She passed Jacob Sparrow's house, with its long verandas. It was built of timber, heavy and solid, different from the others. Demers' house was further on the left, and a score of others were beyond it. Would the moon give no shadow, just where it was most needed? On the darker side of a creepered porch she crouched and doubted. They were all around her now, and, if one should call, she would be surrounded in a moment. Most of the houses were built of latticework, the road being visible to anyone who might lie wakeful within them.

Nothing stirred. There was no sense in this; having come so far, she only increased her risk while she waited. With the sudden courage of desperation she made straight for the structure where the goatfoot servants slept who were neither women nor satyrs. It was thickly thatched, for rains were sometimes heavy, and the roof spread out and downward beyond the walls. It was walled half-way up, but less strongly, for winds were rarely violent, and the position was sheltered by the outer circle of cliff, and by the hill beyond it. The upper halves of the sides were entirely open, except for the pillars which sustained the roof. Internally, it was divided into two compartments; one was used for the weaving of cloth from hibiscus-fiber, in which these creatures were employed when their services were not otherwise needed: one was their sleeping-quarters. They could not get out when the door was shut, for they were unable to climb. The method of building gave protection both from sun and wind and rain, with abundant ventilation which the heat required.

FORTUNATELY, Marcelle remembered in which division the day's labor was carried on. That would surely be deserted now. She climbed the wooden wall with a silent agility which she would have thought impossible two years earlier, and then dropped down quickly to the floor.

It was darker here than on the moonlit turf outside. Though the upper parts of the side-walls were left open, the projecting slant of the roof prevented any direct moonlight from entering. But there was a diffused light that was sufficient for her purpose when her eyes had adjusted themselves to it.

The apartment in which she stood was long and rather narrow, with looms and spinning-wheels ranged along its outer wall, and a row of benches before them.

On the opposite wall, against which she stood, many garments were hung on wooden pegs; some new, some sent for repair. Marcelle could have taken an ample armful, and escaped as silently as she had come. None would have stayed her. Had she done so, she might have saved many lives and much trouble to herself and others. But Marcelle was modest. She would follow the mode. And her mode was of Paris, not of the descendants of half-bred Chilian women. Modesty (which has no relation to virtue) is a somewhat tyrannous mistress. Marcelle was sure that she must have clothes. She was (if possible) surer that she would never wear those which she now found before her.

Let us be fair to those clothes. The material was good, and they were well-woven. As to their designs, it is at least certain that Marcelle would have worn uglier, had she been satisfied that a thousand other Parisians, of a satisfactory social standing, were making a similar exhibition. But having no such assurance, her mind was repelled by an ugliness which had no license.

Besides, they would not fit her. Most of the island women were short and very thickly made, as mongrel women of certain descents are apt to be. That was their misfortune. It was their fault that indolence and gluttony had united to add a covering of fat to their natural dimensions. Their clothes were designed accordingly.

The creatures that wove them—it is difficult to classify them accurately either as animals or human slaves—appeared to take pleasure in their work, and some of them were very skillful, but their skill was not wisely directed.

They produced garments in which irregularly shaped patches of crude and violent colors blended discordantly, one into another, or they portrayed objects upon them.

They were mostly of an ample size, for

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the amenities of the climate had not inclined these women to a reduction of covering, such as might have been considered a likely consequence. Rather, the fact that the garments could be produced in greater abundance than they could be worn had incited a spirit of competition among them, in which each strove to wear more than her companions.

This explains why half an hour passed before Marcelle emerged again in the moonlight.

She tried garment after garment, and discarded them with a visible shudder of disgust. She disliked the prospect of meeting Charlton in a garment the arms of which were absurdly short, the material between them sagging loosely in front, and in the same condition behind, however tightly she should lace it. A garment very light and thin and finely woven, but of which it could only be hoped that the colors would look better in the sunlight —a hope for which a very sanguine mind would be needed—and with images woven upon it, so that it looked, at best, like the walls of a children's nursery.

She was quite sure she was not going to introduce herself to Charlton's notice in so absurd a drapery.

In the midst of this dilemma she became conscious that the ugliness of these garments was more easily visible than when she had commenced to inspect them. With a start of fear she realized that the day was coming. It was at the same moment that she came upon something which she might consider to be at least a possible covering. It was a man's tunic, such as were worn on their hunting expeditions, leaving the legs free below the knees. The tunic was of a silver-blue color and was without embellishment, except that its edges were embroidered in a darker shade. Marcelle seized upon it with avidity.

She had vaguely intended to acquire some variety of wardrobe on this pilfering expedition, but she had no longer thought for anything but escape, if time should still permit it. Already there were sounds of movement on the other side of the partition.

Less easily than she had come, for the loose tunic embarrassed her, she climbed the wooden wall and dropped into the shadow of the veranda.

It was lighter than she had supposed, and the need for flight was urgent. Dawn comes quickly in equatorial regions. She glanced right and left, and saw no movement; but eyes might soon be looking from the score of dwellings. They might be looking now. She remembered that she was at the further end of the settlement. The idea came that she might be wiser to leave it at that side, though it was furthest from the forest, and to return by making a circuit through the bushy slopes that lay between the settlement and the bog.

She passed round the veranda and found that the woods were not a hundred yards away. There was no reason why they should have been cleared for a greater distance. There was no cause for cultivating the ground while food was abundant without effort. There was no fear of enemies, such as would make the denseness of the woods a possible cover for attack.

MARCELLE crossed the cleared space very quickly. She was confident that no one had seen her. She came to a narrow path that ran into the wood. She remembered having explored this with her father, followed by a watchful retinue. She remembered that it led only to a little pool at the edge of the bog lands. So it did then; but that was two years ago.

She went on with a sense of exaltation. She could scarcely restrain herself from singing. She had done that which she came to do, and was escaping to safety. Before her was freedom—companionship —other things, of which she was glad, and shy to imagine.

She had acted prudently, and her memory had not betrayed her, yet she went forward gaily to her own undoing.

She came to the stump of a felled tree. Then to several on her left hand, at the side of the path. Then to a fallen tree which lay across it. She attempted to clear it, forgot the impediment of the short but unaccustomed skirt, and came down rather awkwardly. She was bruised, but her temper was unruffled. She was too light-hearted for such trouble to invade her serenity. If she considered the trees at all, they gave her no warning. If they wanted timber, they cut trees. That was natural. What of it?

Then she came in sight of a bungalow, large, newly built. She was close upon it at the first sight, and as she stopped abruptly, a woman came out.

A tall and leafy tree was overhead, and with an instinctive resort to her accustomed safety, Marcelle reached for its lowest branch. She drew herself up, confident that she had escaped unnoticed.

Climbing higher, she observed that the

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tree in which she had taken refuge was isolated on three sides by the felling which had taken place around it. On the fourth another tree of a like kind grew closely, toward which she made her way, and then hesitated, for it had commenced to sway in an unnatural manner. She looked down through the leaves and saw that a man was moving below her. She saw also that there were ropes round the tree's trunk. She could not see from her position that it had been cut through most of its thickness, but the swaying motion, and a creaking, cracking sound from below, were sufficient evidences of what was happening.

Could she cross it before it fell? It might be her one chance of safety. She was in the mood to venture, and knew that she was too late at the same moment. With a rending of strained boughs, and a final crack at its base, the wounded tree bowed over and crashed at an increasing speed through the surrounding branches of its neighbors, that could delay, but had no strength to support it.

Marcelle looked down, and became aware that the fall had exposed her to sight from below. She drew back hastily, and a man, who was already looking up to observe what damage the fallen giant had caused to the surrounding trees, observed her motion. Their eyes met with a mutual shock of recollection. It was Pierre, the carpenter.

AFTER the death of Marcelle's father and her own disappearance, there had been an hour during which Pierre's life had been somewhat precarious. M. Latour's revolver had been used to deadly effect; the girl was gone; there was no disposition to regard the introducer of these strangers with gratitude. The proposal that Pierre should be executed was popular, and required only the decision of Jacob Sparrow to have been carried out with a very cheerful alacrity. It was his craftsmanship that saved him, of which he had already given some demonstration.

Jacob remarked very reasonably that he could use it to make any articles which were required, and that they could always put him to death if he should cease to be worth the keeping. As he proved useful, they kept him busy in their service. It was practical slavery, but was not onerous. As time passed, he was allowed to build a house for himself, but was directed to do this at some distance to the rear of the other dwellings.

Pierre was a man of the blond French type, with a full fleshy face and a beard that straggled widely, but had no density. He looked somewhat heavy and awkward in his build, but he trod with a silent lightness. His voice, like his tread, was very soft. He would have killed a sheep with tears in his eyes—and enjoyed the tears. He was a good workman, and industrious. He considered his own comfort, which inclined him to confine his more strenuous occupations to the coolness of the early morning hours.

There is no doubt that there had been a time, after their first landing on the island, when he had calculated that Marcelle was destined to become his wife. He had despised Jean, and though he had not underestimated the character of her father, he had relied upon the absence of competition and his own attractions (which he may have overrated), even if the opportunity for more violent arguments might be deferred.

Marcelle had rejected his first advances with a contempt which she had been at no care to conceal, and this attitude had doubtless contributed to the complex motives under which he had betrayed her into the hands of the Sparrows.

She had shown her contempt, but there had been a secret fear that she had not shown, which came back as she gazed down upon him, joined with a rush of memories of those nightmare days of captivity, with the final scene of bloodshed and her father's death. She looked down, but she neither moved nor spoke.

Pierre was at least equally startled, but his mind adjusted itself the more easily. It was obvious that she had escaped the bog, and remained concealed in the forest. For a moment he debated the possibility that she might have been kept in the settlement without his knowledge, but he rejected the supposition. The lives of the community were too open. Their houses were not adapted for such concealments. She might have been in the custody of the priest of Gîr, but the position in which he found her, and the pilfered garment, the significance of which he was quick to recognize, joined to other facts which his mind reviewed rapidly, made it seem improbable.

He realized what had happened very easily; it was less easy to decide on his own course of action. But he saw at once that he must first capture, and then conceal her, before the community should be astir. Then he would have time to consider. He supposed that Demers would

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have her for a wife. If only the old man were dead!

He addressed her in French, as casually as though it were a natural and expected meeting. *"Bon jour, mademoiselle;* hadn't you better come down and have some breakfast?" The question might have been humorous, or asked with a light good-will, to relieve an awkward situation. But Pierre did not joke, and the soft tones were full of menace to the girl who heard them. She looked around, but the nearest tree was far beyond the possibility of reaching it. He noticed, and understood the glance; he saw that she made no movement to carry out his suggestion. He whistled to the woman who stood watching from the door of the bungalow, and gave her some directions which Marcelle could not hear, when she came to him. She went back into the hut.

He spoke again, as one who reasons quietly with a foolish child. "They will soon be about, and they will tear you to pieces if they catch you. You will be safe in my house."

She knew that she could very quickly be safer than in his house, if he would let her go, but she knew that he had no such intention. No less, she saw that she would gain nothing by remaining where she was. If she came down, she would gain nothing by having shown her reluctance. She dropped from branch to branch, very conscious of the impeding skirt, and feeling awkward in consequence, but to Pierre the revelation of her ease in the descent confirmed his first conclusion.

His hand grasped her under the arm as she reached the ground. The woman had returned, and was holding out a short length of rope.

"Put your hands behind you," he said, "I shall have to tie them." She started at the word, and commenced to struggle furiously, but the grip on her arm held, though not easily. He was amazed at the strength of the lithe body that strained away.

He said, without raising his voice, "Don't be foolish. They would kill us both if they found us together, unless they thought that I had captured you for them. I shall only tie your hands. If you make a noise, they will be here in a moment."

She did not know why they would act differently because he had tied her hands, or what he meant, but she knew he was false, and she could not easily consent to such loss of freedom. But she had a great dread of those with whom she was threatened. She knew it was true that the noise of a struggle might bring them. Certainly true that he could call them at any moment, and hand her over to them if he would. She would have killed him gladly, as a quick glance told him. But then she realized, and answered in a voice which she tried to make casual, "Very well, if you think it's best, but don't do it too tightly."

She felt the brutal grip that bruised her arm slide down to her wrist. The next moment her hands were secured behind her in such a knot as a ship's carpenter would not be likely to fail to tie. They walked into the house.

THE priest of Gîr was alone with his wife in their private chamber at the rear of the temple. It was built, as was the temple itself, of blocks of hard red stone; square blocks each a cubic foot in bulk, and with surfaces that were smooth as glass. If any knew how or when they had been built thus, it was the old man who now bent over the table. But they showed no sign of age, nor did it seem that time had any power to destroy them.

Projecting ledges of stone, giving the effect of shelves along two sides of the room, were piled with papyri, containing the wisdom of a forgotten civilization. In the center was a table built of blocks of the same stone. It was constructed solidly, except that the stones were omitted at intervals to form knee-holes for those who might sit beside it. Blocks set into the floor before each of these knee-holes formed seats. Otherwise the chamber was bare, except that there was a pile of rugs in a corner, on which a child of about three years was sleeping.

The priest of Gîr was old, but of an undiminished vitality. Tall, lean, dark-skinned, handsome in a hawk like way, with an air of authority which was habitual, he appeared to be equally incapable of human weakness, of human sympathy, or of human laughter. Yet his aspect was without baseness, as it was without generosity. It was austere and remote.

The chamber was lighted by a series of bracket lamps, that showed the priest and his wife seated together and bending over a mirror which was laid flatly upon the table. As the light caught the surface, it showed now as water, and now as metal. The gazers were intent and silent, as though they saw something in its depths which was other than their own reflections. In fact, they saw the moon rise upon the path that led to the forest, and

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a figure that dropped from the trees and moved along it. They saw more than that. They saw into the coming days, and the part that they were destined to play in the tragedy which was now so closely upon them.

Suddenly the woman rose. "I can look no more!" she said, in a tongue which was forgotten when the shepherd-kings were reigning in Egypt. "It is the end of all." She crossed the room and threw herself face downward beside the child. She made no further sound.

The priest continued to gaze into the mirror.

At last he rose. He walked over to the woman.

"Urda," he said, "all is well."

"Well!" she cried. "And what of the child?"

"All is well," he repeated; "you should have looked longer."

"Need you do it?" she asked, after a pause of silence.

"No," he said slowly, "there is no need; but we have gone our own way twice before, and it has not proved a good one. It is the intended way that we see, and we can vary it at our peril. Had we not sought the easier path before, this would not be today."

"Yes," she said, "it is true."

They spoke no more, but went into the temple together. Their understanding was too close for many words to be needed. And the real tragedy was not in the events which had been foreshadowed. It was upon them already. Except for the sleeping child, they were the last of their race. Their son and daughter, husband and wife also, the parents of the child, lay dead together in the temple, waiting for the cremating pyre to consume them.

Eighty of their race there had always been till the strangers came. That was the ancient law. Every time that a child was born which would have increased their number, the community had voted, and the least efficient, or the least needed, the diseased, or infirm, or evil-minded, man or woman or child, had been chosen for sacrifice. It was a good custom. It kept the standard of the race high. They gave their blood to form the stones of which the temple was built, and their bodies to the fire. Every stone was colored by the blood of the sacrificed, saved and included, how only the priests could tell, in those smooth red stones. The blood of many, beyond computing. It was a very ancient law.

But the two who lay dead before the altar now had not given their blood. They had not been chosen for sacrifice. They had died as none had been known to die—till the strangers came.

The strangers had brought disease. Strange disease, of which they had no knowledge, and for which they could find no remedy. It had seemed that all would die. And then the plague had stopped. But not entirely. Faster than their births, their deaths had been. And now the only two who could have continued the race lay dead together—and they had left but one child. It was the end.

The strangers did not know. They had never been allowed to know how fast the race had diminished. Looking in the mirror of fate, the priest had seen that they never would. That at least was sure, if he accepted the fate which the mirror showed. He looked up at the great temple-painting up above the altar, which symbolized the enduring cry of mankind from its isolated planet to the Power which it feels but never reaches; and through the desolation of his heart there came a thrill of exaltation. He saw that the end was the implicit sign of the eternal.

He must do the part that had been given him. . . .

Urda had gone back to the sleeping child. She wished that she had looked longer, and had learned what its fate would be. Now, she would never know. Even he who had seen could not help her here, for even between themselves such things might not be spoken.

MARCELLE was afraid, and bitterly self-reproachful over the over-confidence which had placed her in such a needless peril. She sat on the wooden stool which Pierre had indicated for her use, and thought of the meeting with Charlton toward which she should now have been proceeding. She thought, with a maddening regret, of the free forest life which she might have lost forever. Yet the buoyancy of youth and health were still hers, and it was in no despairing mood that she considered the predicament into which she had fallen. Pierre did not speak. He sat with his eyes on the ground. He, too, was troubled by the uncertainty of the position, and unsure what the events of the day might be.

The woman fed Marcelle. There was nothing inhuman about her face. It was kind and sad, with a refined beauty. She might have sat for a Madonna. She was

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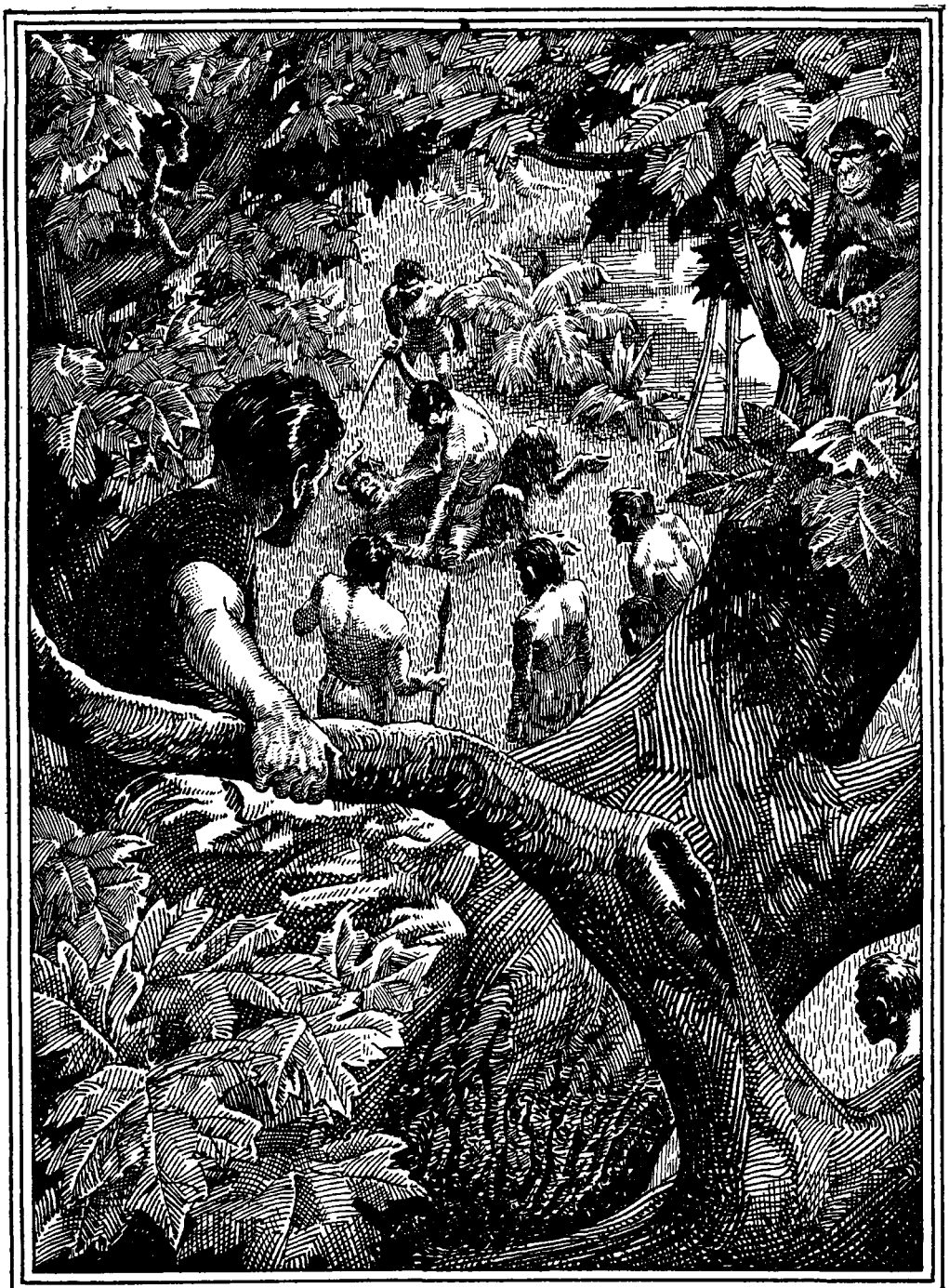

The satyr barked terrified protests as Demers lifted his hunting knife to strike. . . .

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quiet, patient, alert to obey the will of her master even before it was spoken. She spoke little herself, and when she did so, it was in French, which he must have taught her.

Marcelle decided that she was not unfriendly, but that there was nothing to hope for from that quarter. Nor anything to fear, unless it were from her obedience.

The room was airy and light, but less open to outside observation than was usual in the houses of the settlement. Yet Marcelle noticed that Pierre was watchful for any sound. Evidently, he did not wish her presence should be known, or at least not till his own time.

Could she not persuade him to let her go? She considered whether she should tell him anything of the boat, or of Charlton. Why should they not take him with them? He would be an extra hand to help with the boat. Charlton had said that it was beyond his capacity. Pierre was a seaman, as well as a carpenter. It seemed a natural thing to propose that they should escape together.

But—he would guess at once where the boat must be. Suppose he should leave her captive here and take it for his own use, leaving Charlton to his fate? She could not risk such a betrayal.

As she pondered thus, he raised his eyes, and looked at her speculatively. He commenced to speak, and fell again to silence. Then he rose. He looked at his wife. "You had better both stay here. Don't open to anyone till I return." He went out.

Marcelle felt the relief of his departure. Why should she not get up also, and walk out into freedom? She wondered whether she would encounter any active resistance from her companion, should she attempt it. But she quickly saw the folly of such an enterprise. With her hands so bound, what progress could she make? If she got to the palisade unnoticed, she could not cross it. She must do better than that. Pierre's evident confidence that she was helpless was not encouraging. And he might return at any moment.

Marcelle ventured a few indifferent remarks, to which she received replies that were polite, though they went no further. The woman—her name was Rela, the origin of which may have been from any time or language from Judea to Chile—had a voice that was low and very musical, so that the most commonplace word came like a caress.

Then Marcelle came to the point. She remarked on the unseemly size of the tunic that she was wearing. Could a smaller one be procured? Rela looked at it quietly, and agreed with a surprising readiness. Yes, she would do that.

She agreed so readily—indeed, so indifferently—that Marcelle wondered whether she had been understood. But the fact was that Rela had an influence with the slave-workers in the clothing-house that made it easy for her to render her guest or prisoner the service for which she asked.

She agreed at once, but made no motion to put her promise into operation. Marcelle thanked her, and asked when she could hope to have the needed garment—she did not minimize the ugliness, nor the inconvenience, of the one that she was wearing.

The woman replied that she could not leave the house in Pierre's absence, but that she would fetch it on his return. This was not exactly what Marcelle had hoped—though it was more than she could reasonably have expected.

Her thoughts reverted to Charlton, waiting, she supposed, at the spot she had appointed. How long would he wait? If only she had had the sense to tell him where she was going! She did not doubt that he would attempt her rescue, if he should be aware of the peril in which she lay. And perhaps lose his own liberty, or his life in the effort, she thought, with a renewed bitterness of regret at the folly through which she had been captured.

Soon there came a sound of approaching footsteps, and the smooth voice of Pierre outside the door. He entered, with another man coming close behind him. Marcelle had a moment of panic, thinking that it was Demers—come, perhaps, to take forcible possession of the bride that had escaped him previously. It was almost a relief when she saw the form of Jacob Sparrow, leaning on a heavy stick, and coming slowly through the doorway.

WHEN Pierre had gone out, his resolution had been taken definitely, with whatever reluctance, to see Jacob Sparrow and inform him of the capture which he had made, rather than take the risk of concealment.

He went straight to the home of the aged ruler of the community, and found him sitting on the veranda enjoying the coolness of the early morning. It was there that he spent most of his time, only removing to the inner side of the door during the heat of the day. The position was

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of some strategic importance, because his home contained the residue of the stores which his father had brought to the island a generation ago, some of which, including the ammunition and an unexhausted variety of tools and implements, were irreplaceable from the island resources.

This was the only building which was solidly constructed, and capable of being strongly secured. When Jacob left it, which was seldom, except for the periodic feasts (when the whole population would be under his eye, or their absence known and permitted), it was always locked and left in the charge of certain trusted servants whose loyalty was secured by the privileges which they enjoyed, and which his death would very probably terminate. The temptation to attempt pilfering was also lessened by the difficulty of subsequent concealment in the midst of a community which lived so openly, and whose concerns and occupations were matters of common knowledge and continual gossip.

Jacob dozed at his door and surveyed the carpenter's approach through half-opened eyes, in which there was no friendliness, though the dull indifference of their glance gave no indication of the alert and cautious mind which was in ambush behind them.

Pierre was under no delusion as to the old man's feeling toward himself, though he would have been startled had he known how entirely his own purposes were read; or the definite plan for his destruction which was only delayed from week to week, that the community might not be deprived of his services till it should be considered necessary to remove him.

Pierre gave his skill to his masters' use with a suave and deferential manner that attempted no familiarity, and made no friendships. He waited for the old man's death. He saw that he could do nothing while he lived, but he was confident that he could find occasion to outwit his son, whose brutalities were formidable only while his father's brains were behind them. Meanwhile he was too cunning to draw suspicion upon himself by any premature intrigue, or attempted confidence. He kept his thoughts to himself, the while he watched the differences and weighed the characters of those whom he served with so humble an alacrity.

But the old man, watching with a like

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intentness, and brooding over all he saw with a very ample leisure, had recognized him as a potential danger to his son's security; and he had made plans for his removal, which he delayed from time to time, as a man may delay the execution of the will on which may depend the peace and security of those who are dearest to him. There was still useful work for Pierre to do, and Jacob did not regard his own decease as an imminent contingency. So the days passed.

Facing the old man on the porch, Pierre came to the point at once. It would be obscure and tiresome to reproduce the debased and mongrel dialect in which they conversed. In substance Pierre said simply: "The girl was not drowned in the bog. She has been hiding in the forest. I have caught her among the trees I was felling."

Jacob took the news without visible emotion, though it must have been somewhat surprising. After a moment's pause, he replied, "How did you find her? It is easy for those who know to find."

Pierre could not mistake the accusation. It was not entirely unreasonable. It was singular that he, who had brought her to the settlement before, should now be the one to find her. The imputation that he had known more than he had told before would not be easy to meet. But he only answered, in a voice that was even smoother and more deferential than usual, "She was up a tree where I was felling. I think she had ventured here to steal clothes, which she had come to need. I have her in my house. I thought I ought to ask first what you wish."

Jacob was silent for a time. He considered Pierre, but he asked no further question. Then he rose slowly, leaning on his stick. He said, "I will see her. You had better come with me." He called to those within to close the house till his return.

He walked slowly down the center of the path, where the light was strongest. He knew that he was going blind, and he was careful not to show his infirmity. He could still see clearly for a short distance. He seldom went abroad except to the feast-house, and he could have walked there in the dark. It was a road that he had known from childhood.

His going to Pierre's house would have attracted attention at another time, but this was the day of the monthly hunt, and the inhabitants of the village were already assembling at the other end, which was the nearer to the forest.

He walked painfully, dragging one foot. Slowly as he moved, Pierre kept a pace behind, not venturing to walk beside him.

He made no further allusion to Marcelle, but asked some questions regarding the fallen timber as he passed it, and the work on which Pierre was occupied.

Having entered the house, he stood looking at Marcelle for a moment. He was never quick to speak. He looked at Pierre and his wife. "Go outside," he said, "and do not listen."

When they were gone, he sat down on a stool opposite to Marcelle. He sat down awkwardly, and as though the operation of rising might not be easy.

Marcelle looked at him, and was not afraid. Womanlike, she was impressed by his age and infirmity, and she underrated her danger. She had a girl's confidence in her power to win her way with an old man, either by wit or cajolery.

The old man questioned her directly. "Where have you been these two years?"

She answered simply, "I have lived in the trees." Then with a woman's inconsequence, "My hands are hurting me. I do not like them being tied."

He said: "That was Pierre's doing. He is a fool." But he did not propose to loose them. He said: "Why did you come here?"

"Because I needed clothes," she answered. The truth was obvious.

There was silence after that for some time. Jacob Sparrow looked at her, and he resolved that she should be his son's wife, whether she willed or no. Physically, she was of a different order from the diseased and degenerate women of the settlement.

In her mind and character he was disposed to think her superior. With such a wife his son's position would be secured—and with Pierre's removal.

His next question came to the point. "You were to have married my son. Why did you go?"

She said: "It was when they started to kill Jean. I was frightened. And then you killed my father among you."

It was plausible, but not convincing. Jacob did not doubt that she would escape again if she could. Marcelle saw clearly that she must persuade him of her willingness for the marriage, if she were to have any chance of freedom.

He said suddenly, "Do you like Pierre?"

The question surprised her, but the start of repulsion with which she met the suggestion was unmistakable in its complete sincerity.

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JACOB spoke deliberately: "You cannot escape from the island. Do you not wish to marry?"

"Yes," she said; "I might." A thought which he could not follow dimpled her cheek as she answered.

He continued: "If you wish to marry, you must prefer the best man you can get. My son will succeed me. He will have everything. He is the best man here. There is no other so tall, so strong, or so brave as he. You shall be the first of his wives. You shall be the only one, if you wish. Are you not willing to have him?"

Marcelle was silent. She felt that a ready lie might give her the opportunity of freedom, but it would not come. She loathed Demers too utterly. The most that she could do in the cause of duplicity was to look down with an expression which was only faintly troubled.

Jacob put his question again, but in other words: "Are you not content to marry the best man in the island?"

She looked up, and her face changed. "Yes," she said, and there was the note of unmistakable sincerity which he had heard when she repudiated any liking for Pierre.

Magna est veritas. Even to deceive, truth is more powerful than falsehood. It did not occur to him that there might be another man on the island whom she would prefer to Demers. How should it? He was very sure that the priest of Gîr would not look at any woman but his own wife, and his age and aloofness made it an improbability that he would be in her thoughts. She had shown her feeling toward Pierre. So far his judgment was right. She might have seen from her leafy ambush some other man of the community who had attracted her fancy, but it was not probable. He had spoken truly when he said that his son was the strongest and the most courageous. He reflected that the position was different from when her father was living. She had had two years of solitude. After that (he supposed) there were few men that a girl would not be glad to take.

And there was the fact that she had come into their midst from the security of her hiding-place, with whatever excuse for her temerity. On the whole, he was satisfied that his son was her choice. Besides, did it matter? If Demers wanted her, he would have her. There was no other man that would question his claim, or thank her for bringing him into such a quarrel. Jacob was sure of that.

On the whole he was satisfied beyond his expectation. He intended that Demers should marry her, and he would have been quite content for his son to have beaten her into submission; but if she were willing, he was the better pleased.

He said: "You shall see him in the evening. He is hunting to-day." He rose slowly as he spoke.

Marcelle smiled in reply. He could not doubt that she was pleased at the result of the interview. So she was. He could not know that it was the ease with which she had deceived him, or rather that he had deceived himself, and the fact that Demers was away in the forest, that made her eyes alight, and gave a new hope to her heart.

She said, "My hands hurt me," and looked at him as though relying upon his assistance to release them.

He said: "We will alter that. Come with me." He went toward the door.

She rose and followed, though doubtfully. Pierre and his wife stood under the trees about ten yards away, waiting permission to return to their dwelling. Jacob led the way along the path without giving them any notice.

The sight of Rela recalled the promise she had made. Marcelle stopped, and gave Jacob a glance that was at once confident and appealing. "Rela promised to get me some better clothes," she said.

Jacob paused, in his usual manner, while he considered the implications of this statement. "You must come with me now," he said; "you shall have all the clothes you want."

Marcelle saw that she could gain no more for the moment. Evidently he did not yet intend to release her hands. She walked on beside him, looking demurely submissive, and accommodating her freer stride to his dragging steps.

As they were going, Pierre followed, and caught them. He stood in the path with an expression submissive and yet resolved. He was a head taller than Jacob, and in every way the larger man: but with his head bent, he looked something like a revolting sheep—or perhaps not a sheep, but in sheep's clothing only.

"I shall have the reward?" he asked, in the low suave voice that seemed to apologize for its own existence.

He waited anxiously through the usual interval of silence. He expected refusal. He knew that Jacob loved his gold, and the promise was two years old and made under different circumstances.

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Jacob looked at him coldly, but the answer, when it came, was unexpectedly complacent. "You shall have the reward. At the wedding—tomorrow night. Yes—you shall have the reward."

In Jacob's mind a thought that had come to him many times as he sat at the head of the feast-day board and watched the carpenter at the lower end, his broad hunched shoulders appearing apologetic of his own existence, took shape and resolution the while the question had been asked and answered. Yes, it would be sooner than he had intended. And simpler also. He should have his reward.

CHAPTER V

IN THE HOUSE OF JACOB

JACOB'S house was different from the others around it: the main portion, in which his goods were stored, was built of timber, heavy and strong, and roofed in the same material. But around this central solidity there were a number of rooms more lightly built, and differing little in structure from the prevalent style of architecture, except that the roofs were wooden (Jacob thinking that the usual thatch would add to the danger of fire, which was a constant dread to his mind) and that the door was strongly fastened.

His servants, watching through the latticed walls, saw his approach, and the door opened without his knocking. He went in, and Marcelle followed. He led the way along a passage which ran along the side of the outer wall. This wall was lightly built, with a broad strip of lattice continuing along it, at a convenient height for observation by those within. Some light came through, but it gave an effect of darkness to anyone passing from the strong sunshine without.

Marcelle noticed little till she had been led into a room which opened from the inner side of the passage. It had no door, but a wide aperture only. Through this, some light entered from the passage. There was no window. Like all the rooms, similarly ranged round the central store, it had no means of exit except by the outer passage.

Having entered here, Jacob turned to Marcelle, and stood facing her in an impassive silence, as his habit was before speaking to any serious purpose. It would have been disconcerting to a nervous temperament, but the girl had the advantage of a physical condition that required a more definite cause to perturb it.

During the silence of the walk, the thoughts of both had been active, and Marcelle was now resolute to deceive him into such a confidence as would give her the opportunity of escape for which she was watching. She had seen clearly that her knowledge of Charlton's presence, and of the boat by which they might escape, was a concealed factor which might easily upset his most logical calculations. She saw that she had a perilous battle to fight, but, if she fought it well, she had some confidence in an ultimate victory.

Jacob weighed her words, and estimated her position shrewdly enough, so far as his information went, and he judged that she would submit to his will, but he was not quite sure, and the doubt angered him. He felt instinctively that there was some important fact that he did not know, though he could not imagine what it was.

He spoke, slowly and impressively, leaning forward as he did so with both hands on the heavy stick, for he rarely stood for so long a time, and the weight of the gross body tired him. "I will send someone to untie your hands. They will bring you food, and all the clothes you wish. I shall marry you to Demers tomorrow night, telling them all what your position will be. You will be the first in the island. The priest of Gîr is nothing, nor are his people, whom we never see."

He was silent for a moment, and went on in a different tone. "I don't think you will try to deceive me again. But if you do—" His voice changed again, he thrust his head forward, he took a step nearer to the girl who stood facing him, her hands fastened behind her, but she held her ground and returned his look without flinching. "If you do, understand that I will catch you, though I fell every tree in the forest, though I burn it down, though I clear it of all the food it contains. I will let them hunt you as they hunt the satyrs—*and for the same fate.*"

She faced this sudden burst of passion with at least an outward courage. She was cool enough to wonder whether it were genuine, or nothing more than an attempt to scare her.

She said, in as light a tone as she could command, "It doesn't matter, because it won't happen. I shouldn't like to be hunted like that. But I didn't know you were cannibals."

Jacob laughed in derision. "Do you think

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they wouldn't be glad of the change? We have eaten satyrs once a month for fifty years. Do you think they would mind the change, if I set them on you? Just try, and you will get no mercy from me. Have you seen them killed?" He went out.

He was satisfied that she would make no attempt to escape after that. If she had had a doubt in her mind before, he did not think she would dare to do it, after the warning he had given her. But he took no risks. He gave such orders as the occasion required, and he resumed his seat in the building's only doorway.

His servants came and untied her hands. They brought her food in plenty. They brought her clothes from which to choose, only protesting, when she asked for a shorter tunic similar to the one she had, that it was not a woman's garment. She replied that it would be when she had worn it, and had her way. She supposed that the wife of Demers could set any fashion that she would. For the moment she almost brought her acting to the point of reality.

But she got a tunic of the length she wished, short enough to leave her the free use of her limbs, and of a single color. They brought her sandals of satyr-skin, which she put on without enthusiasm, for her soles were of a polished hardness which was little likely to suffer from the floors or paths of the settlement.

HAVING supplied her needs, they left her to her own devices. The heat of the day was approaching, and in spite of all the excitement and anxiety of her position she was conscious of the need for sleep. She had not rested at all during the previous night. A very comfortable hammock invited her occupation.

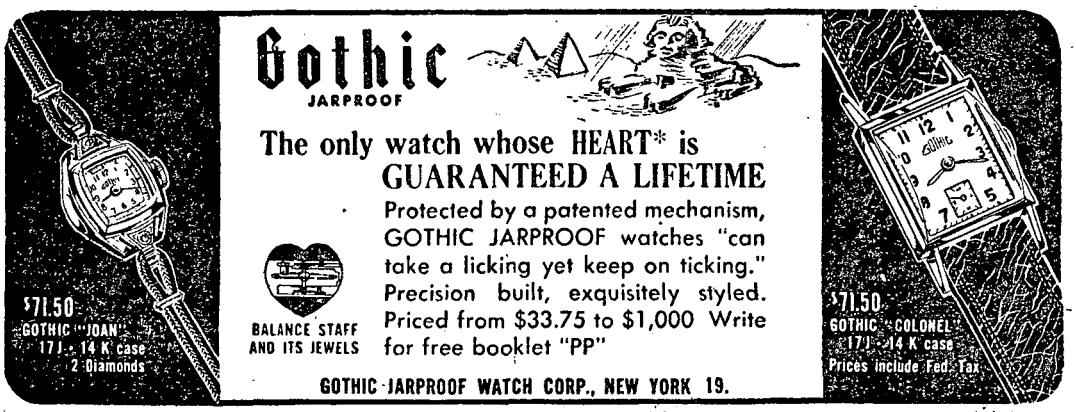
Entering it, she fell asleep almost immediately, but the afternoon was not far advanced when she found herself awake again. It is said that sleep brings counsel, and courage. To Marcelle it did neither. She had fallen asleep afraid, but yet confident that she would escape the danger that threatened her. It had not seemed very imminent. There was till tomorow night in which to escape. Once in the forest, the way of freedom was before her. A way which they could not guess. And any moment Charlton might come to her rescue. Besides, she was very tired. It was pleasant to think that she might sleep, and that he might be on his way to her assistance the while. She had an unreasoning confidence both in his will and in his power to release her.

But she waked in a different mood. The room was hot and oppressive. It was not usual to use these ill-ventilated apartments in the heat of the day, except in the time of rains. To Marcelle, after two years beneath the open sky, it was an intolerable oppression.

Her wrists hurt her acutely—more than she had realized when she had been physically tired, and mentally excited. There were deep weals half round them, where the cord had cut.

When she slept, the crisis had seemed distant—tomorrow night, at the worst. Much might happen in the meantime. Many chances might aid her. She waked to the memory that Demers was returning from the hunt, and that the day was passing. Any moment he might enter. How should she meet him?

Two years ago he had been ugly, brutal, uncouth, a repulsive savage; but he had been visibly uncomfortable beneath her father's critical eyes. Till the hour of the expected wedding he had not attempted any familiarity. Her father had always been beside her.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But he was then an overgrown youth of sixteen years—years of the quick growth of tropic climates. That was two years ago.

Could she deceive him as—she hoped—she had deceived his father? Had she even succeeded in deceiving him? She remembered the question with which he had left her: *"Have you seen them killed?"* She had. It was not a pleasant thought. Suppose she were consigned to such a fate at once, and she should show her real feelings!

After a time, she heard voices and the sound of steps outside the house. She went into the passage, and looked out through the lattice. There she saw the man she most dreaded. Demers came to his father's door. Behind him were those who carried the spoils of the day's hunting.

As she looked, her face changed. *"I never will,"* she said, *"never!"* As she spoke, she heard a movement. She turned, and saw an old woman standing beside her. She was much older than Jacob. Wrinkled like a dried fig. So small and bent, that she was scarcely higher than Marcelle's elbow. Her eyes were small and black, and full of an alert suspicion. Fortunately, Marcelle had spoken in her father's language.

Marcelle went back into the room, tearless and resolute.

Demers spoke with his father in the porch, but he did not enter. Apparently Jacob had decided that they should not meet till the next day.

Marcelle went back to the hammock, and no one disturbed her.

CHARLTON had lain awake for some time after Marcelle left him. Her tale was strange, but he knew it to be confirmed at every point where his own observations could test it. Anyway, he believed it. He was not in a mood for skepticism. He only longed for the return of one whom he might not know when he saw her.

He loved a voice in the night.

Falling asleep, he did not wake till the sun had risen over the cliff-top, and a ray of light, slanting down where the pool made a break in the high canopy of the forest, touched his face, and its heat disturbed him.

He was first conscious that there were troubled noises in the air. The peace of yesterday had left the forest. Monkeys in the branches overhead chattered uneasily. Satyrs barked their warnings, now from one side, now from another. A louder, more distinct noise gained in volume, sounding like the advancing cries of a crowd, and then receded. He recalled that Marcelle had told him that this would be the day of the monthly hunting.

He became conscious of the insecurity of his own position. The island threatened, and his mind recalled the foreboding with which he had first beheld it, and the fear which had dominated him in the dream which had revealed it beforehand. Yet this feeling did not cause him to forget that Marcelle was to return, nor had it power to overcome the excitement of the anticipation. He recalled that she had directed him to the shelter of the tree which was their appointed meeting-place. He decided that it would be wisest to seek such security as it could offer, without waiting for the hour that she had appointed.

Making his way round the pool, he found it easily. It was not likely to be approached by any without a definite purpose, for the ground in which it grew was a deep mud, and on one side it overhung the pool. It was not difficult to climb, and on reaching the top of the bole, he found the place of concealment of which she had told him. Here he could lie flatly and in some comfort, and observe something of the ground below, though not much.

He had a clear view of the pool, and of the drinking-place on the opposite side. Above his head the boughs of a greater tree extended far out over the water. Its leaves were a light and vivid green. It bore a profusion of small cream-colored blossoms, with an orange center, and having a delicious but intoxicating scent, so that, as the day advanced, he found it hard to retain a watchful consciousness.

The cries died in the distance. The forest recovered something of its former peace. The heat increased. The appointed hour was past. But Marcelle did not come. He supposed that in some way the hunt might have delayed her, though he could not imagine why. He did not doubt that she had intended to keep her promise, or that she would be able to do so. He was impatient rather than anxious.

Then the cries of the hunt rose again, returning from another direction. There were sounds of movement below him, at the edge of the pool. He looked down cautiously, and saw three satyrs, an adult pair and a half-grown female. The male had a damaged hoof, and moved slowly and as though in pain. They were conversing with low sounds which seemed scarcely articu-

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late, but must have had meaning to them. He had a fancy that the female was urging something to which the male consented reluctantly. If so, she had her way, for he moved down to the edge of the pool and entered the water. He swam rather slowly across the pool—Charlton had not thought that satyrs could swim, though it was natural enough—but did not attempt to land on the further side. He chose a place where the bank sloped abruptly and stood in deep water beneath a luxuriance of overhanging creepers, only his head appearing above the surface. The two others watched till he had done this, and then disappeared in the woods.

Turning his attention from this incident, Charlton became conscious that the noise of the hunt was much louder, and was approaching the further side of the pool.

It was not long before a satyr came running down the path to the drinking-place. He ran slowly, and was evidently exhausted. His hairy sides were matted with sweat, and there was a smear of blood on his left haunch where a pike had grazed it.

He had escaped for the moment because powder was getting scarce, or so Jacob said—no one knowing the truth but he—and his orders were that the muskets were not to be used unless the noon should pass without a victim having been secured. This one, being almost cornered, had evaded his pursuers through his knowledge of the undergrowth, but he was being hotly chased, under the impression that he was more badly wounded than was actually the case.

Now they were close behind him. He plunged into the water, swimming straight for the spot over which Charlton was stationed. His hunters hesitated, and then commenced to circle the pool, some in either direction. There was no path, and their progress through the bushes was not rapid. They had the longer way to go. Had the satyr been fresh, he might have escaped, but he swam slowly.

When he landed he was a few seconds ahead, but he was not many yards from the water when the giant form of Demers, who had outpaced his followers, burst through the bushes. He had a musket in his right hand, which he held half-way up the barrel, with the butt foremost. He drove the butt hard between the shoulders of the panting satyr, who staggered and fell face-forward. Demers put a heavy foot on the fallen body, and gave a bellow of triumph which was echoed by his approaching companions.

It was echoed also by a party of hunters whom Charlton had not heard previously. They were approaching from the other side, in full chase of two young males that they had just beaten out of their cover. They knew the significance of Demers' shout, and slackened their pace at once. So also did the satyrs that they had pursued.

Demers had thrown down the musket. He had a long knife in his hand. He was on his knees beside the prey that he had run down. He had rolled the fallen body over, and several of his followers had come to his aid, grasping the limbs of a creature too overcome by exhaustion and terror to make any effectual resistance. The two satyrs that had been chased a moment before now crowded fearlessly up, knowing that more than one was never taken at these monthly chases. One of them, bending over Demers to see which of his companions had been taken, gave an audible chuckle of satisfaction. Demers heard the sound, and looked up. Turning suddenly, he caught the creature by one hoof, and jerked it off its feet. As it fell, he threw his weight upon it, shouting to his companions. "Let that one go. This is fatter."

The animal struggled furiously, almost getting clear for a moment, but there were a dozen of them upon him. He barked terrified protests. Demers used the knife to quieten him with a practiced hand. The barking changed to a series of sobbing screams. The satyr that had been released so unexpectedly struggled to his feet. He seemed dazed, and walked unsteadily. He went into the bushes, not appearing to notice the crowd of men and satyrs that were collecting from all sides around the scene of the slaughter.

CHARLTON, looking aside from a scene that was not attractive to contemplate, noticed a form that still hid under the overhanging growth at the further side of the pool. He wondered why it had not come out to join its fellows. Possibly it did not wish that the men should observe its hiding-place.

He made no further effort to penetrate the leafy screen that hid the scene of blood and tumult beneath him. He had seen enough.

How deep, after all, was the real gulf between these degenerated people and the character of the race from which they sprung? he wondered. An Englishwoman will say that she could not bear to kill a

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sheep, or even see it slaughtered, while she lifts the mutton to her mouth. She is not consciously hypocritical. Nor is there any real inconsistency between her words and her occupation. She is only mistaken in the supposition that she is moved by anything but an entire and complacent selfishness. Her objection is not that her presence would be detrimental to the sheep, but only that it would be unpleasant for herself.

If the European must live on the flesh of his fellow creatures, it may be advantageous that he should enjoy slaughtering them. It increases the sum of the earth's pleasures, and does harm to none.

Having no sense of humor, a vegetarian once complained that he had been gored by a bull. That animal has the reputation of being somewhat stupid, but, had he known the zeal with which the vegetarian preached a doctrine which would involve the comparative, if not absolute, destruction of his kind, it is not conceivable that he would have let him escape with some bruises and a broken rib.

The domestic animal is served from birth to death by those who will ultimately devour him. They build houses to shelter him. They toil to grow the foods which he prefers. They perform the most menial offices for his comfort. They are his servants in all things, and, did he not finally pay them the due wage of his carcass, they would not be servants but slaves. If such creatures have a grievance, it is that man is the cause of their degeneration in character and intelligence, owing to the comfort and security in which they live.

Presently there was silence now on the blood-drenched ground. Only a distant and lessening murmur told where the disturbers of the forest peace were retiring in an excited hilarity. The trees waked to life. Parrots called and monkeys chattered. Charlton could hear the discordant cries of a hundred bright-plumed birds that have no use for song, because they do not woo by sound but by color. The sun was past its midday height. The girl had said that she would come before noon. It could easily be supposed that she would fear to venture while the hunting rabble had been immediately beneath him. Perhaps she had been all the time in the high branches overhead. But why did she not come now?

No man (except he be very young) expects punctuality from a woman, unless he have experience of her individual capacity. Charlton did not expect it.

He returned to the appointed spot, and waited there till the evening darkened. He had decided by then that, having been deterred by the alarm of the hunt from coming at the hour she had appointed, she had postponed her intention until the night. It seemed natural that she should visit him in the darkness. But he could not be sure whether she would expect to find him in the place where he had been sleeping during the previous night, or in that which she had appointed for the daylight meeting. He decided that she would be more likely to look for him on the ground, and that in any case she would seek him there if she could not otherwise find him.

So he descended, but not to sleep, for he was now restless and anxious. He lay awake, listening for a motion in the leaves above him, and for a voice that he did not hear. The night was cloudy over the forest, and oppressively hot. It was damp also, and at times a warm rain fell, though little penetrated the thickness of the shade above him. He was impatient to hear her voice, and to urge her departure with him. He must rescue her from this—yes, Jean's had been the right words—from this island of devils. They would not wait a moment after the moon rose, and they could be well on their way to the caves before sunrise. Perhaps they might actually have reached them, if she were able to guide him sufficiently.

But the moon rose and she did not come, and impatience gave place to fear. It became too evident that some accident or misadventure had delayed her. Unless—but he would not think it. He could not think she was false. And yet—he had told her so much. He had told her of all he had, and of where it could be found. And what was she but a voice out of the darkness? The worst of women might have a voice that would win confidence. Yet he would not think it. But it put a fresh fear in his mind, which would not quieten till he had decided to return to the caves in the morning, and satisfy himself that all was safe. Besides, what could he do? He could not seek her in the trees. He might make such a search for months in vain, unless she willed that he find her.

He would do even that, if there should be no other way. But first he would return to the caves. If it were needful, he would seek her even in the abodes of the half-men that he had watched and loathed. He did not think that it would be necessary. Why should he? But some half-heard words returned to his mind with a weight

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of foreboding that they had not borne at the time. Had she gone into some danger, necessary before she should leave the island with him, the nature of which he could not guess?

The thought did not impress him as probable, yet it influenced his decision. If she did not come by sunrise he would go to the caves, supply himself with some extra cartridges and other things that he needed, and would then commence a cautious exploration of the inhabited portion of the island. Having resolved on this course, he slept at last, though very briefly, for it was within an hour of the dawn that waked him.

LOOKING back in the light of after-knowledge, Charlton was always disposed to blame himself for the time which was lost in his journey to the cliffside. It seemed to him as though, while the woman that he loved was in peril, he had thought first of the safety of some tinned food.

He was at a loss to supply any adequate reason for the course he chose. Yet it was not really discreditable to himself, nor difficult of explanation.

He had no definite knowledge of Marcelle's peril, or of where he might find her; he had not intended to be away for more than a day when he set out, and he had no other home or place of security of any kind; he wanted various things, though (apart, perhaps, from the larger supply of cartridges) they were not of great importance. Finally, there was the doubt which had been in his mind since Marcelle had told him of her inability to find the entrance when she had attempted to return.

If he were to have a similar difficulty he would prefer that it should be while he was free from pursuit, or any imminent danger. He wished to be sure that this line of retreat would be open, and could be rapidly taken; then he could give his mind to the finding of the girl with whom he wished to share it.

In fact, he found the entrance with little difficulty, though he was favored in this both by good chance and by the careful survey which he had taken of the surrounding scenery in the days before he had ventured out.

He found everything as he had left it.

He felt the need for rest which was natural after an almost sleepless night, and the watchful tension of the previous day. He decided to remain in the security of his retreat till after noon, when he would commence a systematic search for the girl of

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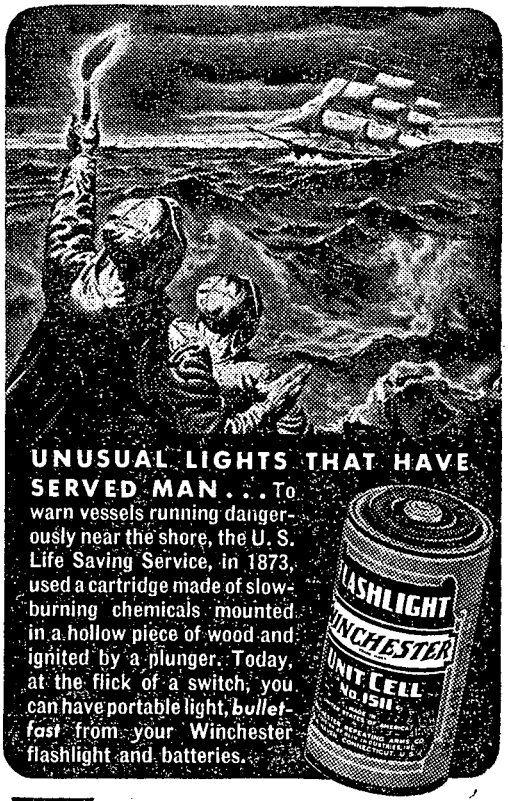
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whom he thought so much, and of whom he knew so little. His mind relieved by decision, he slept for several hours, waking abruptly to a dream of a voice that called him through the darkness of the forest night, not as he had heard it before, in friendliness or in laughter, but with a note of urgent fear.

He had been content before to go with his weapons loaded, and with a handful of additional cartridges in a jacket pocket; but now he increased the quantity. He also fetched out the sword which he had hidden behind the chest, and considered how best he could carry it. After one or two unsuccessful experiments he corded it over his left shoulder. It seemed a novel method to choose—he was not aware that the heavy two-handed swords of the middle ages were often carried in this position—but in the absence of belt or frog, he could not adjust it securely at his side, nor would he risk that it should impede his climbing.

He did not burden himself with food, having learned that it could be found in abundance on the forest boughs. With the rifle slung over his back, his hands were free. He broke away the creeper from the entrance sufficiently to be a guide to the approach as he would near it on his return, though not so that it could be seen too easily from below. On reaching the ground, he marked and memorized very carefully the place where his return ascent should be recommenced. How, he wondered—if ever—should he return? With a companion, or without?—in urgent flight, in furtive secrecy, or in confidence of a successful enterprise?

He looked over the bog at the dark line of the forest, and the sinister impression that he had known when first he saw it returned as a cloud crosses the sunshine.

There were dark things—dark and strange—that the island held, and the peril into which he went was beyond his estimate.

But he shook the foreboding from him, and went resolutely forward to the enterprise on which his desire was centered. For so men will, till the last sword is broken, and the last maid is brought to wifehood. He went to dangers that he could not tell, and to a need that he could not know, for a vision of slim white limbs in the forest gloom, and a head well carried—and for a voice in the night.

Charlton crossed the bog somewhat further to southward than he had done previously, and reached the shelter of the forest without difficulty. Continuing to the south, he came to the palisade of which Marcelle had told him. It must have been originally built of metal or of some very durable wood, but it was now a living wall of giant creepers and of clinging growths, with great trees branching over it. To a man who could climb, it presented no obstacle. Charlton went over without curiosity as to its structure. It was enough that it stood firmly, and had abundant footholds.

ON THE other side he found a difference. Beauty was there, as it had been in the forest; beauty of tree, of bird, of flower and insect. It was as luxuriant as before, but it was curbed and tamed.

Trees fought for light and space in the forest. A score were choked, and one conquered. They took the shapes that the strife allowed. They had the vigor and the scars of their warfare. But here, each tree had its unrestricted space, its full shape. Every flower had its full value.

He had crossed the palisade about a mile further east than the pathway by which Marcelle had traveled. For the earlier part of the way he was distant from any dwellings, or the probability of observation. Now that the feast-night was approaching, the inhabitants were little likely to be wandering in such direction.

He did not know this, but he observed the quietude of the scene; and while he went forward watchfully, his rifle under his arm, he did not delay greatly for the finding of cover, thinking, indeed, that, should he come upon some wandering member of the community, it might be best that he should be seen advancing without evidence either of fear or hostility.

He had not gone far when he came upon some of the great birds of which Marcelle had told him. Remembering the assurance she had given that they were not dangerous, he walked quietly toward the nearest of these, and paused to observe its occupation. At a casual glance it might have been thought that it was merely feeding upon the vegetation around it. But Charlton observed that its attention was confined to the overgrowth of a climbing plant with large white, bell-shaped flowers, like a giant bindweed, and that it was reducing it to an ordered shapeliness by the breaking-off of the pieces which it swallowed.

Further on, he came to a place where three of these birds were assembled around a young tree that showed a sickly appearance among the vigorous growths that

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surrounded it. He saw that they had cleared the soil from one side of its roots to a depth of a foot or two, and, while he watched, he observed one of them draw out an insect or reptile, like a huge milleped in appearance, about eighteen inches in length, and of the color of sea-sand.

Dropping it from his beak, he held it down with a toe across its neck while the three heads bent down to consider it. The birds appeared to consult in low squawking tones, and then, having apparently decided its fate—whether the question was as to its deserts, its suitability for food, or which of them should have it—the captor lifted his claw, and before its myriad legs had hurried it more than a few inches away, the beak of one of the other birds caught it with an easy certainty, and it was devoured in a moment.

Charlton had drawn near to the scene of this drama as it approached its conclusion, and now met the stare of the three birds as the three necks were turned in his direction.

He felt that they regarded him much as they had done the milleped that was now uncomfortably located in the nearest gizzard. There was a look in their eyes, at once amused and assured, which was disconcerting. Yet it was judicial rather than hostile, and he remembered that he had been told that they would not harm him. Probably they only regarded him with curiosity, as a member of the community whom they had not seen previously.

Charlton, like many men who are naturally unaggressive, was not easily frightened. He did not allow himself to deflect from the straight line of his direction, though it took him so near that a stretched neck could have reached him. But, as he came close, they returned their attention to the work on which they had been occupied, and were filling up the hole around the root of the injured tree.

CHARLTON had neither the mental detachment nor the zeal for accumulating physical facts which would have dominated M. Latour under similar circumstances. Had he been informed that they belonged to the oldest of the extant orders of birds because they had no keel to the sterna, he would have been entirely unmoved, yet he looked at them with a lively interest as they resumed their labors.

In shape they were more like the cassowary than the ostrich, though they were somewhat taller, and much larger than the latter bird. Their bodies were longer than is that of the ostrich, and the wings lay more closely. The feathers were almost hair-like in texture. They lay closely, giving an appearance of a smooth compactness to the bodies they covered. Their color was a neutral gray, with some silver penciling, edged with black, on the wing-coverts. Their height was about six feet at the arch of the back, which was highest at the center. They had not sufficient tail-feathers to break the downward curve of the back. Their necks were long; their heads, though really large, appearing small in consequence.

One of the three—the one that had held the milleped under its claw while its fate was decided—had a kind of helmet of hard substance on its head, of a glossy green color. The beaks of the other two, which he rightly supposed to be hens, were broader and flatter, and well adapted for the spade-work in which they were occupied. Their dove-gray heads were smooth and feathered.

Charlton looked at these birds with a natural, but transient, interest. He had a settled purpose before him, and he had a feeling that he was engaged in something that was beyond his own volition.

Alert and wary, both of eyes and mind, he went on rapidly and without attempt at concealment. Approaching from a more easterly direction, he struck the main road just where the bushes commenced, into which Marcelle had adventured.

Clear in the half-dried mud at the roadside, he saw a naked footmark, such as he had first seen in the edge of the forest pool. These bushes were rarely more than four feet high, and they sloped downward to the bog. They grew closely, and he could look over them for a half a mile, or perhaps more. He did not think anyone would make way far through them. It did not occur to him that anyone would attempt to crawl under them for any considerable distance. When they were seen by daylight, the idea was not reasonable.

He went along the road, watching the damper margin of the slimy soil beside it. By good fortune, he found the place where she had come out. The slants of the footmarks at the two places were evidence that her direction had been similar to his own. He supposed that she had hidden, and had continued along the way when some danger had passed her. It was not quite correct, but Dr. Watson's simple-minded friend could have discovered no more, and would have wasted much time in the endeavor to do so.

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Charlton paused at the second footmark. Marcelle's dimple would have shown more deeply than before, could she have watched him as he regarded it. But a footmark in the mud is not a token that the most infatuated lover can easily remove, or is likely to cherish, and this is more especially the case if he be in chase of the one who made it.

Charlton went on with a higher hope, a greater resolution, and an increased wariness. Whether in peace or peril, he had no further doubt that he was about to find her.

The path turned and fell. Its sides were wooded now. It turned again. He heard steps and voices approaching. He found time to consider that he ought reasonably to be frightened, and to observe that he was not, with a passing wonder. But knowledge is power. He wished to observe at leisure. He drew back behind a sheltering thicket.

THE old woman, meanwhile, said to Jacob, "What is the meaning of *'jamais?"* Jacob did not know. She said: "The girl looked at Demers through the lattice. She did not look pleased. She said: *'Jamais!—Jamais de la vie!'* and turned away. She had been crying before. Afterwards, she did not cry."

Jacob did not know what to make of this, but he increased his precautions against her escape. Had she tried, she would have regretted it very quickly; but she did not do so.

The woman was far older than Jacob. He had been in her charge when his father left him on the island. He had some vague memories of his earlier years, but she alone had any clear knowledge of the civilization that was beyond them. For many years she had been the nurse and doctor of the community. Now two younger women, who had previously assisted her, carried on the practice. It was the peculiarity of the island life that it was without organized religion. Priest-craft is responsible for many evils, as well as for much good. The conditions that prevailed here in its absence were its best vindication. But without some form of medical attendance they had found it impossible to exist.

There were superstitions, of course, vague and trivial, and individual rituals of grotesque kinds, but there was no organized religion, and consequently there was no flourishing heresy to contend against it.

The old woman was devoted to Jacob. Inclination and interest were in one scale. Demers hated her. If she watched Marcelle, it was not that she wished to assist his pleasure. But she was one of those to whom youth and all things youthful become hateful as the years advance. The reactions of age to the youth that succeeds it are the supreme evidences of character.

Having a wider knowledge of life than those around her, she was the better able to judge what Marcelle's feelings were likely to be. But, like Jacob, she could not see that the girl had any alternative.

Jacob sat at his door, as his custom was in the morning hours. He thought slowly as he drowsed in the sunlight, but his plans were clear and simple. He would make a speech tonight, which was a greater formality than was usually accorded to an island wedding. He would marry this girl to his son, and he would decree that her children should succeed Demers, as Demers would succeed him. Perhaps, with that incentive, she would be a real wife, and supply the brains of which he well knew his son's deficiency. The plan was not so base as its methods. . . . And he would give Pierre his reward.

When she had seen Pierre have his reward, she would not be in a mood for resistance. Demers could take her home.

Jacob felt that his plans were sound, and his conscience was untroubled. He drowsed in the sunshine.

Marcelle waited. She had decided not to attempt escape, unless a clear opportunity should offer. She waited and watched events, alert to seize any favoring chance. She would meet the need of the moment as it arose. In the end, and till the last, she did nothing. The difference might have been little had she spent the day in despair or resignation, except in herself, which must be everything when the final judgment is taken.

She could not know that Jacob had decided that it would be best that Demers should not see her during the day, and she was in constant expectation that she might have to face him. Fainter, and more vague, was the hope that Charlton might be doing something to aid her.

To her the day passed slowly, though the evening would come too soon.

To Demers it was very long, he was impatient to marry her. She was finer than any other woman on the island.

The time passed differently with the priest of Gir, who lay in the purple gloom of the temple, before the altar that was

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old when the Nile Valley was unknown to men.

It was impossible to see clearly in the temple. The intensity of the color which soaked the stones was like a mist in the unwindowed interior—a mist of color which was neither red nor purple, and through which one looked with difficulty. The image of Gîr, towering to the roof, might be a statue or a mural painting. It was hard to tell. But its terror overcame the heart of the gazer.

The priest of Gîr did not look. He lay with his eyes darkened. His mind searched the ages that were past, and beat against the blind wall of the future. It was all over. His wife was dying. His race was dead. It would all pass at last. And yet not all. There was the child. Life would continue. Alien life, and yet the same. But all that had been, all its thought and all its wisdom would vanish. Though the books that the temple held should continue, there would be none that could read them.

And the world would still hold such flesh-eating filth as these creatures that were less than monkeys, and had destroyed his race with their diseases. Yet he need not die. He could avoid the issue that the mirror had shown him. Very easily he could avoid it. But the girl was not as these people. Neither had her father been such. Nor—though more doubtfully—was the man in the forest. And above all—there was the child. He rose, resolute. He would take the appointed path, and the rest was in the hands of Gîr. Was not Gîr the Maker of the world, and would he not control it to his own ends? Had not the All-God created him so that all it held and did, either of good or evil, was but the functioning of his spirit? Must not every world be as is the different spirit which the All-God gave to create it? Very dark and very bright was Gîr, and he had made the earth to his liking. Made it of blood and fire: of shadows and beauty. And its symbol was the sword. Peace comes, but the sword returns.

The priest of Gîr left the temple. He took a bronzelike sword, straight and sharp—a sword that had pierced the throats of many who had been doomed to death that the race might not degenerate. He fastened it beneath the looseness of the robe he wore.

He went in to his dying wife.

AMBUSHED in the thicket, beneath a canopy of dark-green leaves and heavy-scented heads of hydrangea-like blossoms, Charlton watched a straggling company of about a hundred men and women approach at a slow pace, with Jacob Sparrow at their head. Their numbers were about equal, for the excessive number of women who had been left on this island by Captain Sparrow had naturally not continued itself into the next generation. They moved slowly, for they could not exceed the pace which Jacob set at their head. Eight men came in a bunch behind him, two of whom carried muskets.

As a precaution, though he thought it needless, Jacob had appointed these men to guard the door of the hall, two at a time, during the evening. Charlton looked at their weapons with some contempt. The ancient muzzle-loaders were certainly slow and clumsy beside the rifle he carried—though they caused death and wounds enough at Waterloo or Marengo. He could not know that they were unloaded. Jacob did not purpose that the girl should be shot. Their purpose was to intimidate, and if that were insufficient, they were to be used to club anyone who should attempt to go either in or out without Jacob's permission during the evening. He

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had Pierre in his mind, as well as Marcelle. He remembered also the erruption of Jean on the previous occasion. In fact, he forgot nothing. He provided for everything, except for that of which he had no knowledge.

As a military demonstration, the eight men with the two muskets did not impress Charlton's mind very seriously, but he was conscious of a strange impression, which increased as he watched the procession that followed. It was such as may be felt by a caged, clean feeding bird, which is given nothing but mouse-tainted corn for its hunger. In some indefinite way, the whole concourse was foul and unwholesome. To live among them would be intolerable. It would be nauseating to touch them. The women were squat and ungainly in shape, and coarse and brutish in aspect. Some were gaudily, and some grotesquely dressed. A few were decorated with flowers. The men commonly wore cutlasses. A few had hatchets in their belts. These were sanguine individuals who hoped that a marrow-bone might fall to their portion, and who went prepared to crack it.

Watching this procession, Charlton decided that they were formidable only by their numbers and their brutality. It might not be easy to establish friendly relations with such as they, even should he desire to do so.

Then he saw her. Among a knot of shorter women, toward the rear of the crowd. A small dark head. A skin sunbronzed enough, but lighter than those around her. A face that was made for mirth rather than tragedy, but that showed a mood to equal the circumstance it had to face. He knew that it was she. He knew it by the quickened beating of his heart as he watched her. He would know it more surely still in a moment.

She came nearer, and he was aware of sea-blue eyes that were alert and searching. It seemed to him that their glances met. That must be fancy only, for he was so far drawn into the cover. Then she had passed. He did not venture to move, to observe her further. But he knew that he would follow her to hell, if the need were. And then her voice came, singing. They did not try to stop her. Why should they? There was no order that she should not sing the whole way, if she would.

"N'oserez-vous?
N'oserez-vous?
N'oserez-vous, mon bel ami?"

Had he doubted for a moment (which he would not own) the voice would have told him. And the song? Yes, he would dare. Very certainly, he would dare. But did it mean that she had seen him?

CHAPTER VI

THE REWARD OF PIERRE

THE next hour went slowly for several of those whose fortunes we follow. Charlton had gained sufficient knowledge of the customs of these people to judge that they were on their way to the monthly feast, for which he had seen the meat provided on the previous day. He could not doubt, even without the evidence of the song, that Marcelle went unwillingly. He could not know the extremity or the urgency of her peril, but he was resolved to interrupt the proceedings, and to invite her to freedom. His reason told him that it would be best to let them settled down first before he intruded upon them, while his impatience denied it. His memory was not only of sea-blue eyes, or the defiant lift of a night-dark head. He had the vision also of one who had moved restlessly behind her. It was he whom he had seen club the panting satyr on the previous day, and then pull down the other for a facetious exchange of victims. Irked by the slow pace of the procession, he had been moving with long strides backwards and forwards behind her, his forward stoop and slouching motion showing him like a wolf that waits the moment to spring.

The time passed slowly for Charlton.

It passed slowly also for the priest of Gir, who sat in the feast-house, waiting for the drama to open, the event of which he already knew.

How did it pass for the satyr, trussed now and roasted whole, and steaming at the top of the board? If we knew that, how much also should we know, which is now hidden!

There was an appointed place for each in the feast-house. Jacob sat at the head, with Demers at his right hand.

At the head of each of the side-benches there sat a man to help with the carving. Below the man on the left the priest of Gir would sit, with his wife opposite to him, in the places of honor.

The priest of Gir and his wife always entered by a small side door at the top of the hall, on Jacob's left hand—a door that was reserved for their use.

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This evening he came alone. He explained with brief courtesy to Jacob that his wife was ill. He did not say she was dead.

Jacob saw in this a convenience only. He gave her place to Marcelle.

The board was heaped with many fruits, and there were great vessels of the island wine.

Jacob and his son, with their two helpers, carved at different parts of the carcass, and the work of serving proceeded rapidly. The platters were green leaves, large and smooth and slightly concave These leaves were destroyed when the feast was over. In this they had only adopted a custom which is prevalent in the islands of the Pacific. The unclean European custom of swilled earthenware had died out, if it had ever been practiced among them.

Marcelle's position brought her close to the trussed body which was being carved so swiftly by long-practiced hands. It was revoltingly human in its appearance. Indeed, the prevalence of cannibalism in the South Sea Islands suggest that these creatures may at one time have been generally distributed among them. When they died out, it would be natural for the frustrated appetites of their hunters to turn for satisfaction to their human enemies. Might it not even have been deducted that such creatures must have existed from the fact that cannibalism is so much more prevalent there than on other parts of the earth's surface?

Marcelle did not trouble herself with such speculations, but she had a shuddering memory of the fate which Jacob had threatened. It was unpleasant to think that she might be occupying the same position as the steaming satyr when the next month's feast should arrive. She put the thought from her mind.

Having such fears, and on the threshold of such a crisis, did she refuse to share in the feast? Could she attack the generous portion which Jacob carved for her benefit? The truth constrains me. She could. She was hungry, and she had a very practical mind.

EATING went on steadily at first, and then slackened. Those who had carved were behind the rest, and must concentrate the more upon the portions which they had reserved for their own consumption. Words were few till the first half-hour had passed.

The priest of Gir, eating lightly of the fruit before him, watched Marcelle's appetite with some speculation. It was important that he should understand her, and it was natural that he should be in some doubt as to her feelings and character. The mirror had shown him much, but it had not shown him the eyes that met her own from the thicket, nor could he understand why she looked so confidently at the fate which seemed about to seize her.

Marcelle looked at him with eyes which were equally speculative. He appeared cold and remote, and, to her youthful eyes, very old. She did not think him likely to aid her. Yet she recognized that he was different from the others; a man to trust, as being free from any private business. But not one whose sympathy would deflect his judgment.

At Demers, though he watched her as his hunger slackened, she did not look at all.

Avoiding him, she was inclined to look down the hall. It was the end of the first half-hour, and the guard at the door was changing, so that all might have their meals in turn. As they did so, six of the great rukas came in through the doorway, and sat down below the end of the table. There was nothing unusual in that. They came to be fed. It was in his boyhood that Jacob had discovered that they liked to pick the bones of the satyrs, and had commenced a practice which had now been established for half a century.

How they arranged it, who can say? But there were always six birds, neither more nor less, and they were all green-helmeted cocks; the hens did not come. The turn of these birds came when all had eaten and the carving was over.

Many years ago Jacob had rigged an ingenious device by which their meat could be hung in a large net bag, at the sides of which they would peck, as the hens in a poultry run will peck at a hanging cabbage. It may have suited Jacob's youthful humor to see these sedate birds pecking between the strands of rope of which the bag was formed, while it swung away from them and was returned with an increased velocity by the pecks of their companions.

The sides of the bag were rope, but it had a bottom of leather, so that its contents should not fall out too freely. The leather foundation would be flat and open on the floor, between the door and the foot of the table, until the two carvers should carry down the great dish and tip the bony remnants upon it.

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Then by an ingenious contrivance of a seaman (long since dead) who had once been boatswain of the *Fighting Sue,* Jacob was able to pull a cord which hung over his chair, and the bag would be jerked up and drawn together at the top.

The rukas had learned not to entangle themselves among the loose ropes, or to advance upon their meal until this had been done.

On this occasion, when the carvers had finished their own meal—which they were naturally the last to do—they would have risen to carry down the dish, but Jacob spoke a word to delay them. He then took a long drink of the island wine, and rose slowly to his feet to address the assembly.

He stood silent for a full minute, as his custom was, either to choose his words or because he had found that they gained weight when his hearers were kept in suspense. It was a tribute to his method that he never lacked the attention of his audience, and there was now a silence of expectancy. All were still, ceasing even to eat or drink, or reach for the fruit and wine which was before them.

Marcelle, thinking that the crisis had come, and resolute to resist, though with no clear plan of what to do, thought that they must hear the beating of her heart through the sudden silence of the hall.

She gave one glance down the double line of repulsive half-animal faces, but saw no hope of any help or understanding among them. Gluttony, indolence, disease and dissipation were written there for a child to read them. Cowardice also on most, though some of the men showed an animal ferocity. Certainly there was none to whom she could appeal for any chivalrous help; none whom she would prefer even to Demers; none who would dare to challenge his anger, even were she prepared to reward him for such an adventure. All the faces, except that of Pierre's wife, who sat beside him at the very foot of the board, were marred by a lust of cruelty which was not animal, for animals are not cruel, with the very rarest exceptions, unless *homo sapiens* be classified among them. It was sub-human: devilish.

DIFFERENT only was the priest of Gir, whose eyes met her own for an instant, but she could read nothing from them. She felt that he understood: that he was watching, as a man watches a play. She knew that he was different from the rest. She felt instinctively that he had no sympathy with them. Had he sympathy with her? If so, would it move him to take part in the play? She was sure that he was fearless of them. She felt that he could help her. But she had no cause to think he would. Even Jacob, with all his cunning, in all those years, had never learned what he thought.

Then she was aware that Jacob was speaking.

"Two years ago," he began, "we met to marry my son to a young woman who had been brought here for the purpose. We were interrupted. Then there was fighting, which need not have been, and men were killed, and she was frightened and ran into the forest. Now she has come back. She is a fine young woman, as you can see, though she might be thicker. She has improved since she ran away.

"My son likes her. He can have what he will. You can see he likes her." He glanced affectionately at the figure beside him, which was leaning forward gazing at Marcelle like a wolf withheld from his prey, his great teeth showing and his tongue licking the lips that never quite closed over them. "I think she'll need some beating. Well, he can beat any woman without needing another to hold her."

He gave another glance of affection at his ungainly offspring. "When I'm dead, he will take my place, and if this young woman stays here her son will take it after him." He paused again, and glanced at Marcelle, who sat, white-faced and motionless, with no sign of hearing. "If she does what she's told, she'll be the first woman on this island. What she wants, she'll have; and no one will lay a hand on her except her husband. If she tries to go back to the woods, I've told her that we shall all share her." He tapped the dish before him, and his tone, though jocular, had a note of merciless warning. "We'll have her skinned and lying here on the next feast-day. But she hasn't come back for that."

Another pause, and Marcelle wondered whether she were to be handed over immediately, and the crisis was upon her. But he went on, with a different note in his voice, and her breath came again. "But the first thing is to pay a debt that has been owing for two years. I always do what I promise. There was a man who came and said that he could find a wife for my son who would be better than any of the women here, if I would give him one of these bars of gold when he had brought her. Well, here she is—and he shall have his reward." He paused again,

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and then bent down to his son and said something in too low a voice to be overheard even by those nearest. Then he continued: "We don't allow slaves up here, and it's too far to throw, so as my son gets the woman, he shall take him the reward."

He sat down with a smile on his face, and Demers rose and took one of the gold bars from the pile that lay just below the great dish. He went down the right side of the hall.

The hall was silent, and heads were turned in a dull puzzlement. Why had the gift not been passed down, and why had Jacob chosen his son as the messenger? And why did Demers, who had no love for his father, obey the order with such alacrity?

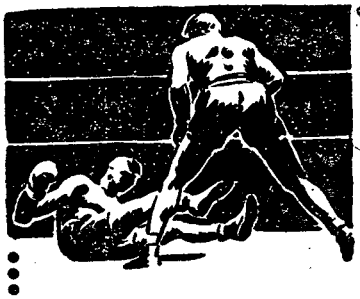
But though Demers went at once, and with a seeming willingness, he did not hand the gift with any good-will when he reached the foot of the hall. Pierre had risen, and stood with bent head to receive it.

Demers stopped a few paces from him. He raised the golden bar as though he were about to fling it in the face of the carpenter. He addressed him with abusive island words for which there are no exact English substitutes, and there is no need to paraphrase them: he accused him of knowing where the girl was all the time, and keeping her from him. He told what he would do to Pierre, but for his father's orders. Then he threw the brick. Pierre raised a shielding arm, but it did not hit him. It fell in the leather center of the bag, and Demers laughed and went back up the hall.

Pierre hesitated a second, uncertain whether there were some malicious intention underlying the position to which the bar had been thrown. He knew well that there was no good-will in the gift, either from father or son. But if he left it there till the bag were drawn up, it might not be too large for one of those monstrous gullets to swallow. Perhaps Demers had hoped that one of the birds would attempt to do so, seeing it in that position. But they did not move. They never advanced till the bag was drawn up. They were sitting quietly now, larger than camels, placid as resting geese. Pierre stepped forward to take his prize, and as he stooped to raise it, Jacob pulled the rope.

THE bag was large, but Pierre was a large man, and it was not intended for such a burden. He was jerked off his feet by the first pull, yet he made a struggle to free himself; and though the cords contracted almost instantaneously as it was raised from the ground, he got one arm out at the top, where it did him no good, the cords closing to tightly that he was unable to use or withdraw it.

For the rest, it closed around him till he was drawn into a ball, the caught arm rendering it impossible for any struggles to alter his position appreciably, even had the tightness of the net been insufficient to hold him. The spasmodic efforts



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which he made caused him to swing and spin in a manner which roused the excited amusement of the spectators, as did the cries with which he begged for release and mercy.

So far it was comedy only, however heartless, but the victim's cries rose to a shrill scream as he became aware that the rukas had risen as they were accustomed to do when the net was drawn up, and were advancing upon him.

They surrounded the swaying bag, evidently curious and uncertain of the unusual meal which it offered. It hung at about the level of their heads, and as it had a leather bottom it was only through the sides that they could reach its contents.

Pierre was fastened so tightly now that in some places he bulged slightly between the cords. One of the birds made a doubtful peck, and the bag swung round toward another. This one pecked more boldly. Its beak showed a piece of torn cloth, as the bag swung away like a pendulum. Another bird jumped at it with half-open wings, and there was a great wisp of Pierre's beard in his beak as the bag swung away in another direction.

To this point Marcelle had watched with no great horror. She had no cause to love the carpenter, and he had been receiving the price for which he had betrayed her when the jest was played upon him. That it was anything more than a cruel jest she had not imagined. But at the scream he gave as the hair was torn out, she forgot everything, even her own peril, in indignation and protest.

"Oh, stop it! Stop it!" she exclaimed, turning from the sight of the horror with a glance that included both Jacob and the priest of Gîr. But the latter was looking on with an expression which showed no sympathy. He did not appear interested in the carpenter's fate, but looked on as an actor waiting in the wings to take his part in the tragedy.

Jacob was leaning forward, gripping the edge of the table with thick red fingers, his face showing an excitement such as he rarely exhibited, while his age-dimmed eyes strove to miss nothing of the drama, which was being played as he had planned that it should be.

He did not notice her protest.

The whole assembly was in a state of uncontrolled emotion. They were half risen from the seats, leaning forward to get a clearer view, gesticulating, and talking to neighbors who did not heed them.

Then came a scream of shriller agony from the swinging net, as one of the great birds pulled away a mouthful which was neither clothes nor hair. Demers had returned to the top of the hall, walking backward that he might lose nothing of the sight as he did so. He was behind Marcelle as Jacob first showed that he was aware that she was addressing him, now with a roused passion of pleading against the torture which they were witnessing.

He spoke more quickly than usual, and with a slurred intonation, as though drunk with the excitement of the spectacle. "He is getting what he deserves. It will be a lesson to you." He looked at Demers. "Take her away. She's yours now. She won't be much trouble now she's seen how we deal with misbehavior."

Demers dropped a huge black-haired hand on her shoulder. "Come along," he said roughly, looking down upon her with an expression that had no trace of love, nor any chance of mercy.

Suddenly the expected crisis was on her. She resisted an impulse to sink her teeth in the hairy fingers that gripped her. She rose from the bench and faced him. The horror that she had witnessed, the excitement around her, had given her a strange exaltation of spirit, in which she heard her own voice in words which she had not consciously intended. "Why do you want me?" she asked, and looked with a fearless quietude into the face that bent toward her.

ALWAYS she would remember the black hair, coarse and long, on the left side of his head where a short horn showed through it. Demers was not good at argument, or rather his arguments were of a direct and forcible order. "Come along," he repeated, but in a voice that was now a growl of menace. He gripped her shoulder again, and at the touch her control left her, and in a sudden passion of repulsion she struck the hand away. She had not lived in the forest boughs for two years without the hardened muscles of her arms, soft and round though they might appear, having gained a strength that many men might have envied. Anger and fear released this strength to its limit. Demer's hand fell, his wrist numbed where the blow struck it.

But it could only be the success of a moment. Demers stood over her, grinning in anticipation of the beating which he would give for her attempt at resistance. She was surrounded by evil faces that

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would take delight in her degradation. They were turned already from the horror at the foot of the hall where the birds were now burying their beaks in a meal which had almost ceased to scream, and from which the blood was spouting over them as they tore it. But the spectators were anticipating another exhibition which would be equally pleasurable to witness. Jacob looked at his son. "You had better break her temper here," he said, while Marcelle looked round like a trapped hare for any means of escape that might offer.

She looked at the priest of Gîr, but he was not looking at her. Her eyes followed his, and stopped, fascinated. Demers, his hands raised to seize her, stopped also, as an unfamiliar voice said with a quiet assurance: "You cannot do that. She is my wife."

Charlton, who had entered by the little door which the priest used, stood a few feet behind Jacob's chair. Till he spoke, no one had seen him, their attention having been turned to Marcelle when it was drawn from the execution at the other end of the hall.

Jacob, turning round in his chair, saw a young man with a rifle, ready, though not threatening, in the crook of his arm, and an air of cool assurance, that warned him to the exercise of his natural caution.

For the moment audacity triumphed. Jacob thought quickly. He must have come from the outer world, and if one had come, there might be fifty. He had not forgotten the deadly use which Marcelle's father, whom they had thought unarmed, had made of the little weapon he carried.

He looked at Demers, who had been paralyzed by surprise into a pause of inactivity. "Wait," he said, "I will deal with this." And then to Marcelle, "Is it true?"

If the girl hesitated, it was for so short a time that it was not perceptible to those who watched her. "Yes," she said. What else could she?

Jacob did not believe her. Why had she not told him before, if it were so? He was aware of the rifle at his back, and he wished to avoid an instant crisis. When he had learned more, he would know what to do.

He looked at Charlton again. He said: "We must talk of these things. Will you sit with us?" He told one of the carvers to give place, leaving a vacant seat between him and the priest of Gîr. He did not wish Charlton to be on the same side as Marcelle.

Charlton advanced at once, and took the offered place. He sat down with his rifle between his knees. The sword-hilt showed over his shoulder. He looked armed and unafraid. He was alone among a hundred enemies. But they did not know that he was alone. Not yet. When they did—

He looked round at the rows of evil faces turned in his direction. They were silent now, watching him with a hostile but puzzled curiosity.

Marcelle, at a word from Jacob and a nod from Charlton, had resumed her seat. Demers had returned to his place at his father's side. He said nothing, but regarded Charlton with a murderous stare, which left no doubt of its meaning.

He did nothing as yet because, though he had no love for his father, he knew that he could depend upon him to provide his wishes more cunningly than he could for himself. He scowled, and waited.

There was a short silence while the old man appeared to ruminate, looking down on his hands. He looked half-somnolent. Charlton began to wonder if they were accepting the position which he had claimed. The ease of his victory seemed incredible. Then the old man looked up again, and commenced speaking slowly and reasonably.

"It is two years since the young woman was brought here by her father to be a wife of my son, to which she agreed. Since then she has been lost in the woods. That is her own tale. Now she comes back and says she is still willing to marry him. She says nothing of having fled from another husband. Can you explain?"

CHARLTON saw his difficulty. He did not know what she might have told already. He saw that the truth might not help them. He saw the cunning that said little, but threw the danger of words upon his own shoulders. He answered with similar reticence, and with a question which touched the weakest point in the indictment: "Did she *escape?*"

Jacob felt the coolness of the parry, but he was not simple enough to be drawn from his own position to give battle on his opponent's ground.

"As I see it," he said, "she is my son's wife. If you claim her, it is for you to explain."

Charlton could not explain. He knew that, and Jacob guessed it. He answered easily: "You have heard her admit that she is my wife. I do not know what may have happened two years ago, but I know

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of some things which have happened since. But does it matter? Neither of us would wish to claim her against her will. If she says she prefers your son, he can have her. There is no need to quarrel. If she prefers to come back to me, I am content. I will not ask what may have kept her here."

Jacob was silent again. He wished to know whether this man were alone. Had he been long on the island? Could he leave it at will? He wondered whether the priest of Gîr knew anything of him. He could not ask without being overheard by the man who sat between them. Nor could he give orders for him to be surrounded and overpowered without an instant danger, both to himself and Demers.

He did not answer Charlton at once, but turned and whispered to Demers, who rose and went down to the end of the hall. He passed the feeding birds, and said something to the two men at the entrance, who laid their muskets down and went out with him.

Charlton guessed that this movement had some sinister intention, and wondered whether he would do well to force the issue before they should return, and then Jacob spoke again. "The young woman has chosen my son, and, as you say, that is final. There is really no need to ask her, but as you wish, I will do so. I have no doubt that she will reply as she should." He was not so confident as he professed to be, but he considered that everything might be gained, and nothing need be lost by this test. He knew that Demers was hurrying with one of the men to fetch powder and ball and loaded muskets, which would place the intruder at an augmented disadvantage, and the other man was searching the vicinity for any sign of a larger invasion. He would soon have firearms in the hall. He would soon know whether the stranger were alone. He turned to Marcelle: "Do you wish to go with this man, or will you keep your word to my son?"

The words were quiet and slow. Only the eyes menaced with a glance at the bone-strewn dish before them, of which Charlton could not understand the meaning. But Marcelle knew.

She looked back with an aspect of courage, trying to speak, and aware of an inward panic which left the words unformed. Her glance turned to Charlton. Gaining there what she sought, she said, "I would rather go." She knew, as the words were uttered, that the final choice was made, and that she was as good as married to this three days' stranger.

She said, "I would rather go," and rose as she said it. It was her instinct to seek protection of the man whom she had chosen.

Charlton rose also. There was the joy of victory in his heart, and confidence.

Jacob showed no sign of resentment, but answered slowly: "She has twice chosen my son. Now she says that she had chosen you. It is a matter which cannot be decided in my son's absence. He will be back in a few minutes. You must wait till he returns. He has a right to know what is decided." For the first time he addressed the priest of Gîr. "Is it not just that we should await his return?"

In the doubt as to whether Charlton were alone, or one of many potential enemies, it was natural that Jacob should wish to know whether he could count upon the support of the priest, and of the unseen people who were supposed to live in their southwestern reservation, and the question was very cunningly addressed to him on a point of procedure, on which Jacob felt that the priest's concurrence might be readily given: but there was no warrant of support in the coldly courteous answer which he received. "They might ask, 'Why did he go?' But it may be best to wait."

Hearing it, Charlton felt an added assurance. Here was a personality as remote as his own from the foul crowd around them, and yet serene and unfearing. He saw also that there was an appearance of justice in Jacob's contention, and that it would certainly be more dignified, and might even be safer, to wait and listen to anything which Demers could urge on his own behalf, than to attempt to force a hurried exit before his return. He felt it essential that they should avoid an aspect of haste or fear.

He said, "We will wait, if you wish," and then to Marcelle, "There is room here," and made space for her on the bench beside him, the priest also moving with the same object.

Marcelle came round the head of the table very quickly, before Jacob had considered any course of prevention, which would have been difficult without resort to immediate violence, which he aimed to avoid.

CHARLTON felt that he had gained much, for his mind was on the side door behind them, and Marcelle was now

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Marcelle stood bright-eyed and silent with the child in her arms, awaiting the outcome.

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as near as he, and, being beside him, he could give her a hint which would be unheard by others. He began to consider the probable result of a sudden retreat in that direction, and to estimate the probable actions and survey the weapons of the men that were nearest.

It was just then that one of the rukas gave a high call—a call so loud that it could be heard not only in the hall, but half a mile away. Jacob knew this call well. It was one which the leading birds used to summon the others for their tasks of the garden. But it had never been heard in the hall before. Now they heard it repeated in the gardens outside. Three times they heard it. It meant nothing to Charlton. It puzzled Jacob. It only told the priest of Gir that the mirror had not mistaken the course which events would take. It was forgotten by all as Demers came back through the doorway.

He came with a man behind him carrying an armful of loaded muskets and a bag of powder and ball. He made no attempt to conceal these. They were distributed at once to those who guarded the door and to others around.

He had learned that the stranger was alone, at least in that neighborhood, and he had returned resolved to settle matters by such ways as he understood, if his father should not have done so already by his different methods. He wore a belt now, with a heavy cutlass and two horse-pistols. He looked up the hall and saw Marcelle seated beside Charlton. She was peeling a red-skinned banana with an appearance of ease which she may not have felt.

Demers came up the hall with long strides, his body slouching forward and his head projecting, as was his way when he walked. His teeth were set, and his face was flushed with blood. Charlton saw that there was something different from Jacob here—something which could not be fenced off with words or adroit delayings. Demers stopped at the head of the table, and looked at Charlton. His glance was murderous, with the ferocity of a beast of prey. He looked at Marcelle, and his eyes changed to a greed of anticipation. She would suffer for this. No, he would not need any other hand to hold her down when he beat her. He had little imagination, but he felt that his hand was in her hair already.

The satisfaction of the thought may have been the restraint which withheld him from one of the uncontrollable furies to which he was liable. Charlton thought that he would leap at him over the table. He had his own right hand in his jacket-pocket, and wondered whether a revolver-shot would be sufficient to stay him. He would have no time to adjust the rifle. He did not like the thought of those hands on his throat.

But Demers did not leap. He said, "Will you fight or go? Shall I kill you first, or will you watch while I beat her?" He did not notice the hand which Jacob raised, or hear the words which were meant to restrain. Jacob saw that the course which his cunning mind had planned was becoming impossible.

Charlton, cooler than his opponent, although having an almost equal willingness to kill, was reminding himself that to lose his own life was to leave the girl at the mercy of the beast before him. He was resolved that he would not rashly incur such a hazard. He only said, "How?"

Demers extended hairy hands in silent and sufficient answer. Charlton was silent. He would be a fool indeed to give himself to be torn or choked in that beast-like grip. The derision of the thought may have come into his eyes and been the spark which lighted the sudden rage of his enemy. There was a knife, long and sharp, which had been used for the carving, lying on the table beside him, and this he caught up and flung at Charlton from his three yards' distance with deadly force and accuracy. It came from a hand practiced in a craft much used in the island, his skill in which was inherited from the blood of his Chilian grandmother. As the knife spun through the air it was a thousand chances to one that Charlton's life was ended.

There was no possible time to move aside, nor to think of any means of protection, but with a blind swift instinct the hand that held the upright barrel of the rifle raised it in an effort of protection which might have appeared absurd in its futility had there been time for thought; and by a chance which was on the verge of the miraculous the point of the flashing blade was caught and deflected on the narrow shield of steel. Charlton was aware that the rifle was almost knocked from his grasp, and then saw the knife quivering in the neck of the priest beside him.

The priest said nothing. He raised his hands and drew out the knife. The wound was neither deep nor dangerous. The force of the throw had been broken when it was turned aside. It had struck him where the

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muscle of the neck joins the shoulder. He showed no concern, though it bled freely. He neither made protest nor asked apology. He looked at Charlton and at the girl beyond him. "Come with me," he said, and the three rose together. Charlton had drawn the revolver from his pocket and watched Demers, ready to shoot at the first moment that threatened danger, but reluctant to do so if it could be avoided. Jacob stared at them, seeming to speak, but no words came. Even Demers appeared to be taken back for a moment by the result of his murderous throw. Since long before his own birth, the priest of Gir had sat in that place, remote, austere, different from themselves, but by his presence giving an assurance of amity between them and the unseen inhabitants of the temple precincts.

It was a pause that must have burst into violence at the next instant, had there not come a scream of fear and agony—and then another—from the lower end of the hall. They were such cries as Pierre had given when the great birds tore his flesh from him, and every eye was turned to the place from which they came, but with different feelings from those which had found a hectic enjoyment in the dying agonies of the carpenter.

FOR while the general attention had been drawn to the altercation between Demers and Charlton at the upper end of the hall, there had occurred a scene without precedent at the lower doorway, where a dozen of the great birds had crowded in at the call of their companions, to pick the bones of the carpenter.

The men who stood with loaded muskets at the door had made no attempt to stop them—though they were alarmed and puzzled by the novelty of the invasion—for it was well understood that their movements should not be molested. But others were seen to be approaching, and the space between the door and the foot of the table was already crowded with these birds in a condition of unwonted excitement, including some hens, none of which had previously entered the hall, when there came the cries which drew all eyes in their direction.

Introduced, as they had been, to a diet of human flesh—invited to tear to pieces a man that was clothed and living—their appetites aroused and unsatisfied—it was not surprising that some of them began to stretch investigating heads towards the men and women that were seated nearest.

These people had been taught from childhood, and had learned by experience, that, if they left the birds alone, they would not be attacked by them. They were not quick to fear, but they shrank and moved uneasily as the long necks stretched among them. And then at the end of either of the long sidebenches, at the same moment, the assault came.

At one a man gave a single scream that choked as a bird's beak closed on his throat and dragged him backward from the bench among the eager beaks of its companions. At the other, scream followed scream as a great beak which had been feeling round a man's feet pushed upward beneath his tunic and buried itself in his body. The man fell from the bench, struggling vainly, the bird holding him down with one foot while it fed. His nearest comrades made no effort to rescue him, but drew back in panic, only baring the cutlasses which they appeared always to wear on these occasions, and slashing the air to discourage the further advance of the necks that were stretched toward them.

Then a man by the door fired his musket, and one of the birds fell. It kicked furiously on the ground, making a great outcry. Then it regained its feet, and stood swaying unsteadily. Charlton could not see where it was hit.

Some of the birds gathered round it curiously. Others—probably the later comers whose appetites were unsatisfied—crowded to feed upon the two victims that had been pulled down.

Charlton noticed the wife of Pierre, who had been seated beside him. When he was given to the birds, she had fallen unconscious from the cross-bench at the foot of the table. There she still lay, faint or dead, but the birds did not touch her.

The priest of Gir looked on as one who watches a familiar scene. He appeared aloof as ever, concerned neither for the bleeding wound in his own neck, nor for the torments of the wretches that were being eaten alive at the further end of the hall. Yet he had drawn a sword from beneath his garment, and held it in an awkward-seeming manner in his left hand. But it was the way to which he had been trained, and the appearance was deceptive.

Jacob sat motionless, gazing with his failing eyes at the tragedy that he had originated. Always more adroit to avoid than to meet a crisis, he made no attempt to control the situation.

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Demers, cursing inarticulately, had run down the hall, a pistol cocked in his hand. Courage he never lacked, and such brains as nature had given him were always stimulated by a call to action. "Stand your ground, fools—slash at their necks," he bellowed, stopping their flight by the confidence of his voice and with the persuasion of a hard-driven fist.

But the birds had not followed them up the hall. They appeared to consult together around the one that was wounded. They did not seem to be either frightened or angered, but, as though they realized a serious position which required further reflection, they made an orderly retreat from the hall. They called to those that were still feeding, and these withdrew reluctantly with blood-drenched heads from their ghastly banquets.

Then things happened very quickly.

Charlton, who might have used the chance to retreat with Marcelle through the door behind him, had watched fascinated for one foolish minute, his instinct being to take sides with his own kind, however base or hostile, against such an attack. He had even thrown his rifle forward, and would have fired could he have got a safe shot above the heads of the moving crowd.

MARCELLE'S more practical female mind suffered from no such confusion. Had she stood alone, she would have been through the door, and in swift flight to her familiar trees at the first moment of opportunity. But she had chosen her lover, and she left the control of their movements in his hands without protest, though with impatient eyes.

As the birds turned away, she heard the voice of the priest of Gîr. He addressed her quietly, but with a deliberate slowness, so that the words would neither be confused or forgotten. "You will take the path you know, and the steps in the south end of the temple. Lose no time. The birds will not harm you. I give the child to your keeping." She did not know what he meant, and there was no time for reply.

Charlton's hand was on her arm, and he was drawing her to the door. Even at that moment a memory waked in her of how she had thrilled to him, as she did now, when he touched her in the darkness.

Jacob saw the movement. He opened his lips to call to Demers to stop them. His eyes met those of the priest of Gîr, and the words were unspoken. The next moment they were unspeakable.

With a swift, strong backward sweep, the priest's sword had reached his neck. The keen thin blade, impelled by the full strength of the practiced arm, passed completely through it, and was not checked in its course. There was a second during which Jacob sat with a stunned mind, not knowing that he was dead. He tried to rise, but the thought came too late for the severed nerve to convey it, or he might have walked headless, as a fowl will do in the like case. He gazed down at the hands that would not move as he willed them, and as the shock lessened he was aware of a fire of pain around his neck. He saw his body slip sideways beneath him. His head rolled on the table.

It was over in an instant. We may suppose that he lost consciousness very quickly, as the blood drained from the severed head. Knowing nothing, we may suppose what we will.

It was at the same instant that the priest of Gîr fell forward as a musket-shot sounded from the lower end of the hall. It was not fired with any purpose to harm him, but from a trigger pulled in panic by one of the sentries at the door as the birds crowded out, and he had mistakenly thought that one was about to seize him.

Charlton saw the priest fall, and turned back, though Demers was already running up the hall with a rabble of followers more willing to attack a single man than they had been to face the beaks of the rukas.

The priest looked up. There was no friendship in his eyes, nor surprise, nor fear. He was remote as a god. He said, "I am killed. Go quickly. There is the child." Charlton thought that he meant Marcelle. He remembered her peril, and went.

He ran through the door, pushing Marcelle before him and swinging her aside as he passed it, out of the line of fire. He heard the explosion of Demer's horse-pistol as he did so. Standing aside, he put an arm round the door, and fired his revolver three times in rapid reply. Blind though the shots were, he judged that they could scarcely fail of effect on the advancing crowd, and at the best would check them, as indeed it did, though for not more than a minute, for their flight was seen and shouted by others who had run out from the main door.

"Run for the trees," he said. "I can keep them back here." But she shook her head. Her voice trembled into laughter. "I can run faster than you."

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He saw that she would not go alone, and ran with her. They would have gone due north, by the side of the hall, and toward the distant safety of the forest, but the men who ran out from the front would have cut them off. Hearing that they were on the run, Demers came with his followers through the side door. The spreading line of pursuit was forcing them toward the temple grounds.

They heard the sound of Demer's remaining pistol. It was a useless shot at the distance which they had gained. Musket-shots followed, but there was little precision in those ancient weapons, and, whether well or badly aimed, the bullets did not come near them.

Marcelle ran the more easily, for the two years of forest life had given muscles and breath that the advance of civilization had left behind, and she was lightly clad and unburdened, but Charlton's longer stride kept beside her.

GAINING the shelter of some scattered trees, he turned in hope to check pursuit with his rifle. The chase was scattered now, there being only three that were near them, with Demers twenty yards further back, and the rest straggling over a space of two hundred yards behind him.

Charlton fired twice, and the foremost pursuers paused. He was not sure that he did any damage.

Demers, stooping to a thicket's shelter, reloaded his pistols.

Charlton would have fired again, but Marcelle called to him that they were being surrounded while they stood, for though they had checked the progress of those who were directly behind them, there were others running far to right and left who did not slacken.

Then they ran again, faster for the breath they had gained, and down a turfy slope, where speed was easy. Here they gained on those who were on their left, as the ground there was less favorable, but on their right, between them and the forest, the pursuers had made better way, and their retreat was now cut off entirely. They must go straight on toward the temple, or turn to the unknown land that stretched to the southward cliffs, where there might most probably be the same boggy hollows which they had learned to dread on the eastern side.

They were going uphill now, at a slackened speed. Here they showed plainly to their pursuers, and the muskets sounded.

Over the ridge they paused, looking round for the best way to take. Life and death might hang on the choice of the straight path or the trammeled way. "I know," she said, and ran on with a fresh courage. She had seen the way which she had gone with her father two years ago, and knew that they were on the shortest track, where all must be as strange to their enemies as to themselves.

Charlton spurted, and came level. "Did you mean it?" he asked, surprisingly. Their glances met, and she did not pretend to mistake him.

"But no!" she said, with eyes that laughed and mocked and challenged. He caught her hand in reply, and they ran on together with a new speed and lightness.

The path they were now on ran straight forward. Its surface was lawn-like turf. At times it was closed in by a luxuriance of flowering bushes, or by groups of trees, of which each one, in an ordered peace, was given light and air for its full growth, relieved from the fierce pressure of the forest strife and the stranglehold of its creeping parasites. They had a great, though a different, beauty. They bore no scars: they were of an untested valor. Their growth was of a complete symmetry. They had fulfilled themselves, as they could not have done in the stress of the forest strife. They demonstrated the blessings of peace. And yet—their peace was founded on the ruthless destruction of all that would have competed around them. Life was less here than in the forest—certainly less in its total, perhaps less in its degree. It is the insoluble problem. War is evil—and without evil there can be no good.

But the trees reached mighty trunks aloft, and found free air and light abundant, and the warmth of the tropic sun. Did they look far off and scorn the savage trees that fought for life in the forest? Or did they envy? Would the lightning strike them at last, that might have spared had they not risen so high and so far apart?

A few months before, Charlton, sick of life and its futilities, had lounged on a hotel veranda—Marcelle had dreamed and longed in the safety of the forest boughs.

Now they ran for their lives. War had found them—love and war together. If they escaped at all it would be with the blood of others on their hands. Were they less or more than they had been? Were they blessed or cursed by the net of circumstance that had caught them? God knows—Who made the world and all its wonders.

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CHAPTER VII

THE FLIGHT

THEY ran on in good hope of safety, though they knew that they were half surrounded. Perhaps the greatest doubt in Charlton's mind was the reception which they would meet should they attempt the forbidden sanctuary of the temple that now rose in plain sight before them, a pile of square-built ruby-colored stone, that glowed intensely in the sunlight.

It was surprising that pursuit had followed into this forbidden territory, but it had been led by the blind fury of Demers; and the death of Jacob and the priest, the revolt of the rukas and the spectacle of their ghastly meals, had roused a frenzy of excitement to which these people were liable, a frenzy which affected them as a mob rather than as individuals, and some of the effects of courage. There was also the idea in the mind of Demers that the strangers must be prevented at any cost from carrying the news of the priest's death to those who (he supposed) might be roused to avenge it. And then, besides, there was the girl. . . .

Though he had little intelligence, he was a cunning enough fighter. He had no code of honor to encumber his mind. He wished to kill, and to capture. He had no intention of being killed if he could avoid it. He could have run faster than he did, having more endurance than most of his followers. The pace of all—pursued and pursuers—had gradually slackened as the miles were passed, but when he found that he would have outdistanced his companions had he kept straight on, he made a slanting junction with those who were attempting to outflank the runners on the southern side.

Such was the position when they came in full sight of the temple.

At this point the path was hedged on either side by some flowering shrubs, ten or twelve feet in height. They had very dark green leaves, tinged with scarlet, and great balls of cream-hued blossom of the size of a man's head. These were not easy to penetrate, but could they do so, they would make direct for the southern end of the temple. Marcelle remembered the words of the priest. They pushed through them. They were abused by the colony of dark green paroquets, with lighter crests tufted with white, that made the bushes their home.

Emerging on a higher path, they met a child. I think, though I am not sure, that Charlton might have passed her. But Marcelle stopped. The child was about three years old. She was dark-eyed, slender, olive-skinned, with an exotic beauty of the kind that does not change with the years. She walked as one who is lost and bewildered, and yet goes on with a purpose. She stopped when they came out of the bushes. She looked at them with eyes that were wild and shy, but she did not retreat.

Marcelle spoke to her, telling her she must not go that way. What fate might not be hers from the savage crowd that pursued them? The child looked with uncomprehending eyes. She said something in a strange tongue. The tone was plaintive, the words evidently a question, but they meant nothing to those who heard.

Charlton looked troubled. "We mustn't wait," he said doubtfully.

"We can't leave her here," Marcelle answered.

They looked up the path; they even called through the bushes, but she seemed to be quite alone.

MARCELLE reached out her arms, and the child hesitated and then came. Marcelle lifted her, and the child trembled a little and then clung closely. She made no sound, but Marcelle saw that there were tears on the long dark lashes. She thought of the baby monkeys that she had left in the trees. "Come on," she said, and began to walk forward. Charlton was refilling the empty chambers of his rifle.

"You know it means they'll catch us," he said.

"We couldn't leave her," Marcelle answered. "Could we?"

He said: "Very well. But let me carry her."

"No," she answered. "She's not heavy. You must be free for anyone that needs killing."

There was a fierceness in her voice which he had not heard before. There was a blend of hardness and tenderness in her nature which would often baffle him in the days to be.

He had the sense not to argue. They went on at a quick walk.

He felt sure that there would be fighting now, and he began to calculate the men and weapons that he might have to meet, and to think how best he could counter them.

Could they find ambush where there would be an open space around them, wide

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enough to be out of the range of muskets? He was confident that his rifle could hold them back under such conditions, as long as his ammunition should last. But after?

There was one thing in their favor. The night was coming. It is significant of how much longer these events have taken to tell than to act that it had not fallen already. It was not yet four hours since he had heard the voice that asked, *"N'oserez-vous?"* of one who hid in the thicket.

If they could lie concealed now, the darkness might help them to a further flight, and to safety.

Could they reach the temple burdened as they were? It did not look to be very far, but such appearances are sometimes deceptive.

What reception would they meet if they gained its shelter?

The child might help. But what if there were no one there who could understand them? The priest had been able to speak the corrupt English of those he met, but it was clearly not his natural language.

Or suppose that these people should attempt to seize Marcelle. After the manner of Demers?

It seemed to Charlton that they went from danger to danger.

His mind was on the forest, the cliff, the safety of the caves—and of the waiting boat.

But Marcelle's thought was different. The temple was her goal. She had an instinct that it would be the place of their security. She did not vex her mind with imagination of who might receive them, or in what way. She knew that the priest of Gir had been of a different quality from those from whom they were flying. She remembered the words which had seemed unmeaning when she heard them —*"You will take the path you know, and the steps in the south end of the temple. I give the child to your keeping."*

Well, she had the child, and she would go to the temple. It was Charlton's part to help her to get there. She did not doubt he would do so. She trusted him as she had once trusted her father.

She did not know that Demers crouched in a thicket a hundred yards ahead, with a loaded pistol in either hand.

He fired the first one too soon. He was not a very skillful or practiced shot—Jacob had not allowed the use of powder except for the actual hunting, and then pistols had not been customary.

He saw Charlton advancing with his rifle ready, and he remembered the execution that M. Latour had done with a smaller weapon. So he let fly his first bullet at a distance of thirty or forty yards. It went somewhat wide, and too high. It warned Charlton, and they might have retreated at little risk, but he chose the bolder course. He did not wish to be surrounded in such a position as they then occupied. He ran forward, firing as he did so at the spot from which he thought the bullet had come.

HE WAS not far wrong, and his shots came unpleasantly close to the crouching Demers. No doubt the second pistol was fired the sooner in consequence. Still, there was little wrong with the aim on this occasion.

Charlton felt the bullet strike his right side with such force that he retained his balance with difficulty. It passed on, leaving him with nothing worse than a bruised rib, and some broken skin where it had struck him. He did not know how far he was injured, and he had little leisure to consider it.

He had seen the hand with the leveled pistol, and he fired again at the man whom he knew must be behind it. The shot missed, and the rifle was empty.

He lowered it, and drew out his revolver. He did not know that he had missed, but he wished to make sure.

Then two men ran out of the bushes with cutlasses in their hands, only a few yards away.

He fired at the foremost—fired again—and the man fell, rolled over, clutching convulsively at the grass. He would give no more trouble. The second hesitated, and ran back. Charlton's shots followed him. He gave a cry of pain as the bushes hid him. He was certainly hit.

The revolver was empty.

So far, Demers had not risen. He watched, waiting his chance, while the others risked lives which he felt to be less valuable than his own.

Now he saw Charlton commence to reload the revolver. He knew what *that* meant, though he had no knowledge of repeating firearms. It was the chance he sought, and he drew his cutlass and came out boldly.

To Charlton it was the supreme test which comes but once or twice in a lifetime. His instinct was to fly. Demers came with a rush, his cutlass lifted over his head. Charlton had the sword slung over his shoulder, which had cumbered him all the day, but he had no skill in its use.

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Neither in strength was he any match for his brutal enemy.

But Marcelle was behind him, and he could not leave her. He looked for an instant, and saw her, bright-eyed and silent, and the child in her arms. She had no doubt what the end would be.

Charlton drew the sword and waited the rush of his opponent. Courage—and ignorance—were his salvation. Demers came with the cutlass raised over his head, meaning that the fight should end with the first blow, as, in fact, it did.

Charlton did not think he could parry such a stroke with success. Probably he was right. It crossed his mind that, if he struck straight at Demers' throat, he could still kill his enemy, even as his own death descended. Marcelle would be saved.

Even as the downward stroke was in the air, Demers realized his peril. It was no satisfaction to him to kill Charlton if his own life were to be the price.

Too late, he tried to alter the direction of his stroke, to guard his own throat from the point on which he was running.

In the result, he neither killed Charlton nor saved himself. The cutlass jarred against a blade that was already through his neck, and showed three inches behind it.

Charlton was thrown back against a tree by the force of the rush which he had encountered. His grasp held to the sword-hilt with difficulty as his enemy fell with his weight dragging upon it. He looked down on a face that was convulsed with an insensate fury. Demers struggled to his hands and knees, and then collapsed again, as his lifeblood pulsed from the wound.

Charlton stepped back quickly as a hairy hand reached out along the turf to grip his foot with no friendly purpose.

But it was the end. Rage fought with death in the glazing eyes, and death conquered.

Marcelle, looking down, said, "Thank you," and then, "Oh, but I am glad he is dead."

Then went on through the dusk.

NO ONE followed them further. They looked back at a group that had surrounded their fallen leader, and hurried the faster for the sight, but the pursuit ceased.

Their need was now to reach the temple before the light should fail them.

What reception would wait them there they could not tell, but they went on without discussing its wisdom. Marcelle, at least, had no doubt that it was the right thing to do. And they had the child to take care of.

When they reached the temple, the sun had sunk below the ridge of the western cliffs, and the swift tropic shadows were gathering under the south wall, but they found the steps which the priest had told, and went bravely up them.

They came into a passage which had doorways at intervals. They saw no one. They called, and there was no answer. They hesitated to go further. What right had they there? What explanation could they give if they should be questioned in an alien tongue?

Marcelle set down the child, which had been asleep in her arms. She said, "Perhaps she can guide us. Let her go first."

The child went on confidently. She came to the door, or, more accurately, the open archway, which led to the room in which the priest had consulted the mirror. It had no window. It was lighted, as always, by the lamps around it.

There was a heap of rugs in one corner, as there had been previously. Near to these a large leaf, filled with fruit, lay on the floor, with a bowl of water beside it.

The child went straight to these, drank from the bowl, and then commenced eating.

Charlton said, "We must find some one. Will you stay here with the child, while I search further?"

"No, don't leave me," she answered. "I should be afraid. And besides, can't you see? The food was put here for the child, but it's a man's room. He had her here because there is no one else to take care of her. She tried to follow him because she was frightened to be alone. How she got down those steps—! But you won't find anyone, however long you look. The place is dead."

Charlton wondered if she were right. He looked round at the bare solidity of the chamber—at the shelves of ordered papyri—it all spoke of permanence, and of an established civilization, however alien from his own.

In some indefinite way it reminded him of the figure in the cave—and of the drawings in the upper chamber, of some of which he would not willingly think—yes, it might even be as old as they. It must have endured very long, and if it were desolate, it could only be a desolation of yesterday. It seemed improbable—and yet her confidence impressed him.

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At last he said, "Well, suppose we rest here for tonight, if no one comes to disturb us, and make a search in the morning."

Marcelle agreed, though she knew that such a search would be fruitless; and there was neither night nor day in that unwindowed room where the lamps glowed continually. She wanted to rest now.

Charlton looked at the heap of fruit from which the child was eating. He was hungry and thirsty. There was enough for all. The child drew back as he approached, with eyes that were shy but not unfriendly. He tried to reassure her with words which would have no meaning to her. She went to Marcelle.

There was a brief silence after that, the child clinging to Marcelle with a hidden face. She was aware of tears, though there was no sound, and her arms tightened to comfort her.

Both she and Charlton were physically exhausted. They were drained of emotion. And their position was difficult. They had become everything to each other, while they were still strangers; it required the interval of sleep to adjust their minds to all its meaning. The presence of the child that had come to them for protection drew them closer, and yet divided them.

But, beyond this, they felt differently.

Marcelle's mind was content and happy. She had won the man she would have. He had justified her choice, and she had no fear of the future. And, besides, Demers was dead. Life was good; but she was tired now, and would sleep.

She lay down with the child in her arms, and was asleep in an instant; the hardness of a wooden pillow, shaped to the head, which was at one side of the rug-strewn corner, having no power to delay her.

BUT Charlton could not sleep. He was excited and restless. He paced the chamber continually. He was conscious that he was worn out, and sat down at the table more than once, only to discover that he could not remain still, and to resume his vigil.

So much had happened. So much might still remain to discover—to plan—to avoid. The stake had become so heavy.

He looked down at the sleeping girl, of whom he knew so much, and yet so little.

He had seen her face only a few hours ago. He had never more than touched her hand. No—he had once touched her foot in the night; but he did not attempt to repeat it.

She was one of those fortunate girls who look their best when asleep. Fatigue had left her face, where youth triumphed. Her lips smiled, as though a dream had pleased her. Her bare arm was around the child, who slept also, nestling closely, content in its new protection.

The short tunic that she wore did not concern itself to conceal her—and it was torn in places, for the bushes that had met their flight had not all been thornless.

He saw that her body must be sunbrowned from heel to head, though only lightly, for which she had to thank the shadowy ways of the forest leaves.

Only the soles of her dust-stained feet were very dark, polished to a deep chocolate color by the treading of many boughs.

He looked down at the lithe grace of the sleeping girl, at the smoothly rounded limbs. She was the woman he loved. She was his by her own word. At his life's risk he had won her. They might both be dead before another night should know them.

He reached for a rug that lay beside, and drew it over her and the child.

Then he looked at the steel mirror that was set into the table. As he gazed, he was aware that it was not steel but water. There were shadows in the water. Steel-blue shadows that moved.

After a time the shadows grew lighter. He saw the houses of the settlement. It was morning. He saw a crowd of men that moved in the direction of the temple. Was he dreaming? he wondered. His eyes left the mirror. He looked at it again and could see clearly that it had a surface of steel. Obviously he had dreamed. Yet he continued to look, and was less sure. It had again an appearance of water. He saw movement again, though this time it was clear almost at once, as though the earlier vision might have commenced in the night-time.

This time he saw the sea and the high cliffs as he had first see them when he had approached the island. Only, he was now looking down from above. He saw a boat—his own boat—come out of the cliff-tunnel. It was full of men, and some women. They were trying to spread the sail. It appeared that they disputed and struggled among themselves as to how this should be done. He saw the overloaded boat heel as the wind caught it.

It was long after that Marcelle waked. Her first sight was the wide-open eyes of the child, that still lay in the shelter of her arm, and had watched her, silent and unmoving, for many weary hours. Some-

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thing that was nearly a smile came into the grave eyes, as it knew that she had wakened. It said something which she could not understand. She must teach it her own words.

She kissed it impulsively. It did not draw back, though it had known nothing of the custom of kissing, which was not used by the race from which it came. It reached out a timid hand that touched her face as lightly as a falling leaf. From the ages of separation of race and custom, nature drew them together.

MARCELLE rose, yawning. She showed small teeth, white and sharp, that had been taught their use on many nut-shells—teeth that she had longed to sink in Demers' hand when it came on her shoulder. But that was yesterday. Demers was dead. She looked round, wondering how long she had slept. Charlton slept still, his head on his arms. She would not wake him yet. There were physical necessities to consider. She was dirty, and she hated dirt. She must straighten the mass of shortened hair (long hair will catch on the branches—it is too dangerous in the forest) which she had cut and tended the best she knew how for the last two years—but then time was endless.

She noticed that the child was busy eating again. There was still some water. But if she used that for washing, where was more to be found? And she was thirsty—and oh! so hungry. Why was the food on the floor? She supposed that the priest had put it there for the child's reaching.

Marcelle made herself as tidy as circumstances would permit.

Then she decided to wake Charlton.

Stooping over him, she saw the mirror on which his head was pillowed. To her it was a mirror only. But "only" is not a word that she would have used to describe it. It was better even than the forest pool. Marcelle smiled. She looked, and appeared satisfied. She saw a long rent in her shoulder, showing cream-brown flesh, firm and smooth. She did not think it unbecoming.

She looked at Charlton with uncompromising Latin eyes, that even love would not blind in the seeing. It was an ordeal for any man. He was disheveled, and dirty. So was she for that matter. She was well content with what she saw, and a song rose to her lips and awaked the silence to unfamiliar melody. He was the man she had chosen, and he had killed Demers to win her love.

Seeing that he was still asleep, she bent over him and kissed his neck. He moved instantly, and looked up to see her at the further end of the room, surveying him with a grave demureness. Undeceived by her attitude, his waking mood rose to meet her own. He got up quickly, to feel a sharp pain in his side, that left the eager words upon his lips unspoken.

She was beside him in a moment. "What is it?" she asked anxiously.

He replied, "I think Demers hit me. I hadn't thought of it since. It can't be much." But he was less sure of that than he professed, and the thought that he might have a bullet in his side, with no means of extracting it, was not pleasant.

"Let me look," she said, and they explored together. It was nothing more than a flesh-wound that had stiffened and broken out again when he rose so suddenly, and an aching rib that was only bruised, not fractured. But they could not spare any of their remaining water to bathe it. They ate, and drank, and discussed their further action.

The presence of the child limited their choice. If they should take it with them, it must impede their progress, either to the caves or the forest. They could not leave it alone. They could not take it without first ascertaining that it had no living parents or others to whom it should be returned. So they decided; though Charlton, at least, saw that either course brought an added danger to a situation which was sufficiently precarious.

It seemed to him that it was unreasonable to suppose that the child had no guardians who would be seeking for and must shortly find her. Already they had brought her back from her wandering. To do more was to lose time, and to risk contact with those who were strange and might be hostile. If they should meet with no one, then to take the child would be an encumbrance, and there might be those who would misinterpret it as an outrage, though they were not visible now. It seemed so improbable that they were alone. Even though the temple was deserted, there must surely be life in the buildings that were beyond it.

But it was clear to Marcelle's mind that they could not leave the child. In fact, she did not wish to leave it. By intuition rather than reason, she was sure that they would find no one living. In her own phrase, the place was dead.

To her the search was perfunctory, but she agreed that it must be made. They

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searched the temple first—the smaller rooms, and then the great hall itself. They saw many strange things, which we need not stop to consider. There may be another time for the telling.

BEFORE they left the chamber in which they slept Charlton had noticed an open papyrus on which the priest had been writing. Beside it were some books that were amazing, till he thought of the natural explanation. "Pride and Prejudice," a Newgate Calendar, a Bible, a Nautical Almanack, the speeches of Charles James Fox, a book on farming, and some others; old and dirty books which the priest had acquired from a generation that had forgotten their use.

He saw that the papyrus was partly covered with English words and letters, partly with a writing which seemed unlike anything of which he had knowledge, even of ancient times. He saw that the priest had attempted to probe the mystery of the English books. Possibly in earlier years there may have been those who could help him. Might it be that here was a clue by which the piled wisdom around him could be deciphered, even though its writers had perished?

They searched the remaining chambers in the temple. They went a few paces into the colored gloom of the temple itself, awful in its desolation. They turned their eyes from the dim figure of Gîr.

They made their way to the buildings behind the temple, finding the sun high in the sky, and learning how long they must have slept as they did so. They searched houses that were silent and desolate, where the dust lay quietly. They saw many strange and some inexplicable things, which must be left untold—or at least on this occasion. They found fresh garments which they were glad to take. They found water, and cleansed themselves of the dirt of yesterday.

Charlton was glad to cast aside clothes that were still heavy with the dried slime of the bog, and caked with the blood of Demers (which had spouted over his ankles as the dying wretch had tried to reach him) for the lighter, looser garments that this dead race had worn, and which were cleanly stored in many of the deserted dwellings.

The child walked beside them silently.

They climbed once to a flat roof that gave a wide view, extending to the white walls of the feast-house. The dream or vision of the previous night—Charlton could not decide upon its nature—came back to his mind. He half expected to see that advancing rabble as he had then beheld them.

He saw, instead, a little group that fled across the land with three of the great rukas pursuing them. It was a race that could have only one ending. Running with raised wings, the birds had a speed that would have left a greyhound far behind them. Yet the men panted desperately forward, a race for life of the most literal kind, for there was no hope for the hindmost.

When the birds reached and pulled him down, the others stood still, looking round in bewildered fear, for to run further might be to approach another group of their enemies. Was this all that was left of the visioned crowd that had set out in the morning to seek them while they slept?

They debated whether they should leave the confines of the walls that protected them. Marcelle was anxious to regain the shelter of the forest. She said, "It's not far. I don't think the birds would harm us. I should think they have got all they want by now. Anyway, I think we should be safe from them. Besides, you have the rifle."

Charlton hesitated. He had had enough of fighting, unless it were necessary. But it had to be done. It might really be safer now than later. He answered, "Very well, we'll go at once. If the boat is still safe, we might load up and leave by tomorrow."

Marcelle was silent. She loved the forest life. She thought that the dangers of the island were over. She had won the mate she needed. She dreaded the thought of the open boat. But that could wait. She only said, "We will go quickly. You will need your hands free for the rifle." She picked up the child.

THEY regained the forest without adventure. They noticed that the satyrs were running about in a wild excitement, but they did not molest them.

They crossed the bog and climbed the cliff, finding the opening of the caves without difficulty. The interior was vacant and undisturbed.

It seemed that the adventure of the land was over, and the adventure of the sea was all that lay between them and the civilization that had been, four days ago—to Marcelle at least—a thing remote and unattainable.

Charlton proposed that he should go

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forward alone to ascertain that the boat and stores were unmolested, while Marcelle waited with the child. Then he would return, and they would rest till morning, and then load the boat and set sail at once, or as soon as the wind were favorable.

But Marcelle would not agree. She would not be separated. She would go with him, even though it meant that they must carry the child. She was silent and irritable. Charlton looked at her with a puzzled wonder. They had come through a great peril together, during which she had been brave and cheerful. They were united not only by a spoken word, but the sacraments of common loyalties and of common dangers. Yet now that it appeared that they had come through them in triumph, she had become strange and distant. She insisted that he should not leave her, yet she was aloof and silent. She did not meet his eyes, and his words were left unanswered.

Was it strange that he began to wonder whether she had only used him to assist her extremity, and was now fretting against a bondage that irked her?

For herself, she did not know the meaning of the mood into which she had fallen. Desires and fears warred within her. They warred with hidden faces, so that she could not tell the one from the other. When they came to the shaft beneath which the boat was moored, and saw it swinging uninjured on the ropes that held it, she had a feeling of sharp distress, and realized that her secret hope had been that some unforeseen disaster had overtaken it.

Charlton said: "If we begin early in the morning and only load it with that which we most need, we might be away at midday. I took much longer to clear it, but it will be quicker work to lower the things if you are there to receive them." He spoke of the sea-worthiness of the boat, and of the progress they might hope to make with her help in sailing it. If they steered northwest they had all the North American coast as their objective, and long before they reached it they would be in the fair-way of a thousand ships, and would surely be rescued.

She did not answer. He led the way back, carrying the lantern; she had the child, which was now tired and half asleep, and clung to her with a frightened shyness.

When they were half-way along the passage, they came to the one that branched aside, which Charlton had not explored previously.

Here she called to him to stop, saying that it led to the chamber which her father had used, and where they would doubtless find the chest in which his papers were kept. She would like to save these.

Charlton suggested, reasonably, that they might get them when returning to the boat in the morning.

She replied that it was drier than the room that opened into the face of the inner cliff. If they had to spend the night in such a cave, they might as well choose the drier.

This was reasonable also, though the tone in which it was spoken was less so. It appeared to Charlton to imply that to stay within the caverns was an evil for which he was responsible.

To him they had seemed a retreat from many dangers, which they should be thankful to have reached together.

Fortunately he had the gift of silence. He had the gift of sympathy also, and through the pain he felt at an estrangement which seemed so causeless he tried to understand the feelings which underlay it.

Perhaps, he thought, she had slept so long beneath green branches and the open stars that she had become impatient of confining walls. Yet she had lain down happily enough in the temple room. No less, he was partly right, though her trouble went deeper.

He went with her along the passage, and they found the room which she was seeking. The chest was there, and its contents were dry and uninjured.

Charlton said: "If you would rather that we stay here, I will fetch anything that we shall need." He hesitated, and added: "Perhaps you would like to be here with the child, and I can watch at the entrance. You will be quite safe. I will close the top of the shaft over the boat."

She said: "I don't know—I will come with you to get the things. But I don't think I shall like it. There is no air here."

They were nearly at the end of the cross-passage when they heard voices.

With a swift motion he obscured, and then extinguished the lantern. But the voices had already passed. They were receding toward the chamber beneath which the boat had been moored—the chamber that contained all his possessions.

He felt Marcelle's hand on his arm. They followed silently. There was no need

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for words. They knew the voices of the island speech; they knew the forms that were revealed by the torches they carried. They saw that their entrance must have been observed, and that they had been followed as soon as the remaining inhabitants of the island had collected such things as they wished to save.

TERRIFIED by the great birds that had now abandoned their usual occupations to chase and feed upon them, their leaders killed, not knowing what vengeance might be impending for the priest's death, they had followed Charlton in the hope of discovering some means of flight from the island.

Charlton counted over thirty, as they collected in the chamber over the shaft, scattering his possessions, and searching till they found the stone that covered the shaft, and removed it.

He stood very near to them in the darkness of the passage. Marcelle's hand was still on his arm. She whispered, "Let us go back and talk." He hesitated, and as he did not answer her grip became firmer, trying to draw him backward.

Had he been alone, he would have walked out at once to claim his property. He regarded them as less than human, and he did not think them formidable now that their leaders had fallen.

They should go back the way they came!

But it might be better to do this when he had seen Marcelle and the child in a place of safety. What did these people know about boats? It would be long enough before they had all clambered down the shaft with their lanterns, even should they decide to attempt it. Still, there was no time to lose.

He went back, therefore, at the urging of her hand, feeling the way for a short distance, and then lighting the lantern. He did not care much if they saw it. They went all the way back, though he became increasingly impatient as they did so. He recognized that, having started, he could not leave her with the child alone in the tunnel-darkness.

The sun was near setting. It shone into the aperture, from the sides of which the creepers had now been completely torn by those who had climbed through it, making a transient brilliance in the gray gloom of the chamber, and reflecting itself in the water that dripped in the inner corner.

Marcelle laid down the child, now sleeping soundly, on the bed which Charlton had made on the drier side of the room. Strong though her arm might be, she was glad to be relieved of the burden, but she showed no sign of fatigue when she rose and faced Charlton in the sunlight.

There was a great relief in her heart, and a gay light in her eyes, that surprised him into a momentary forgetfulness of his own impatience. Here again was the spirit that had been so swift in mockery of the thwarted satyr, that had made light of danger as they had run

THE UNDYING MONSTER
by Jessie Kerruish

A place of midnight silence . . . an hour when Death gave up its secrets . . . a moment when a doomed man dared reach beyond the grave to save generations yet unborn. . . .

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together on the previous night. It was more than that. He felt that the shadow which had fallen between them had cleared away. Here was the Marcelle whom he had known in the night—who had won his love before he had seen her face in the daylight, who had owned him before the table of their enemies, but who was still the girl who had not come to his arms, the stranger whom he had not kissed.

Yet he knew that he must not linger. "You will be safe here—" he began.

She interrupted, as though she did not hear him.

"I suppose they will take the boat," she remarked, as though it were a natural thing, and of little moment that they should. A smile parted her lips.

As she said it, she was aware that Charlton's arm was around her. "You are divine," he said, and she found herself held close and her head bent back for his kisses.

Then her words penetrated to his mind, and recalled him to the need of the moment. He loosed her reluctantly, as he answered:

"No, they mustn't do that. I don't know whether we ought not to try to take them. But they are too many, anyway. They might crowd in, of course. But they would overload the boat. It wouldn't be safe, and we couldn't take enough provisions for the risk of a long voyage. No—it wouldn't do."

Then he added doubtfully: "We might take one or two to help with the boat." He had a feeling that there might be some decent ones among them, and that if they wanted to escape he ought to do what he reasonably could.

"I shouldn't come," she answered with a quiet demureness. "But that doesn't matter. I shall be quite happy here."

"You wouldn't—" he began incredulously. "As though I should go without you!"

Her eyes lifted and challenged him, and again his arms were around her. For a moment only, she returned his kisses. Then she struggled for freedom. "No," she said, "not here—not here. . . . Did you think I would go with those wretches?" she asked, in the tone of one who is investigating a curiosity of natural history.

"Well, I don't want them," he replied, with an obvious sincerity, "but while we talk they may be capsizing the boat, if they don't get off with it entirely." (How she wished they might!) "If you will stay here, I will soon deal with them."

He turned to go, but with a quick movement she was between him and the passage.

"What do you mean to do?" she asked.

"I shall send them the way they came," he answered. "The goods are mine, and so is the boat. I don't think they will be much trouble."

"You forget," she said, "that they will have found the arms you left there."

That was true. He had forgotten. He had only told her casually of them in the long talk of their night in the forest. He was surprised that she remembered. There were arms there more formidable than their clumsy muskets. But they might not easily find out how to use them.

"I don't think that will make any difference," he answered stubbornly. "If you want the boat clear you shall have it."

She broke out with a sudden change of mood, when she realized how hard it was to deflect his purpose. "Do you care nothing that you will leave me here alone?"

"But what else can we—" he began, and was interrupted.

"Cannot you see that we are safer here? There is no danger left, unless you make it. Why should we drown in a boat? *It is all ours, if you will let them go.*"

Then her tone changed as she stepped aside to let him go if he would. "Of course, you can do as you like," she said pleasantly. "Some people like caves and boats. I like the forest."

She gave an instant's glance at the child, who was sleeping soundly. She looked at Charlton again with mocking eyes. "Bogs," she remarked, "are best crossed in the daylight."

The sun, that was now only half visible above the cliffs of the western side of the island, caught the darkness of her hair as she turned and slipped out of the opening.

Charlton, following, saw her dropping down the creepers at a speed that he could hardly hope to equal.

He followed her through the failing light, but he got no nearer. He followed till her form became dim in the growing gloom, though she fled no faster than he pursued her. At last he followed only a voice that called and mocked him.

"N'oserez-vous?
N'oserez-vous?
N'oserez-vous, mon bel ami?"

Now it was night in the forest. He followed a voice in the night.

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(Continued from page 8)

craft? I have this masterpiece. Since it was published only in very limited edition books, may I request its printing that others may enjoy it?

Since I am a fantasy fiction fan and a rather amateurish collector of the same I would like to get in touch with others of F.F.M. readers in the vicinity of Kewanee—object: to trade, borrow and loan books and magazines in the field. I have several I would like to get and several others I wish to dispose of. From what I read in various "viewpoint" letters some of those I have to dispose of are much sought items. May answer letters from those further away that are interested in trading but won't promise to answer all of them immediately.

PAUL C. GUNN.

536 Franklin,
Kewanee, Illinois

Editor's Note: Jessie Kerruish wrote "The Undying Monster." It will appear in the June issue.

LIKES "TRUE FANTASY"

This is the first letter I have written to your magazine. I have been reading F.F.M. for almost three years, and I have been reading Fantasy for much longer than that, and yet I can say with all the truth in the world that I have never seen a magazine which came anywhere near equaling yours.

"The Machine Stops" is the kind of novel that I like to see. I get bored to death reading of unnatural people in unnatural, ancient times. True, there are certain types of stories I approve of, such as "The Boats of the Glen Carrig," or "The Day of the Brown Horde," which have a more or less ancient plot, but as a rule I like my Fantasy modern. "The Machine Stops" was just this type of story.

"Before I Wake" is what I like to term true fantasy. Many yarns listed under the heading "fantastic" are just horror stories or past history. Kuttner's story is one of the best.

"The Boats of the Glen Carrig," has that gloomy morbidity which is so necessary in a story of its type. "Even a Worm" is wonderful. This is also another "true" fantasy. The best short story of the year.

"Phra the Phoenician" was quite good. As I said, though, I don't like this type. Excellent characterization, especially on the Abbot.

I did not like the short. Do not like stories bearing directly on present day happenings. Had a good idea, though.

"The Ancient Allan" I did not care for. It was—shall we say—a little corny in spots. Also a little too similar to "Phra." The short was good. I wonder if Dunsany wrote any longer stories. One of them would be delightful.

I would like to see something by Blackwood, Lovecraft, or H. G. Wells in F.F.M. Perhaps "Marginalia," or "The Mountains of Madness," by H.P.L., and "The Willows" by Blackwood. Anything by Wells would be suitable.

PHILIP WILSON.

Woodbridge Ave.,
Buffalo, N. Y.

FROM KYUSHU, JAPAN

The other day I was sitting in the Battalion Aid Station contemplating the monotony of another of too many days in Japan. Then along came one of my buddies with some mail—some for me. That immediately turned on the sunshine. Opening one of the letters I found a "Fanews" paper which said that F.F.M. would appear more often.

That made me feel good and reminisce a little.

When I was still with the Navy in the States I used to read each issue, then write in about it. Then when the Navy sent me on duty with the Marine Corps, (I guess they thought I couldn't hurt Marines with Merthiolate, APC tablets, and battle dressings), it sort of fouled up the mail situation.

I became fantasy starved.

However with the news of your resuming monthly publication, I thought it was time I got on the ball and made certain of "F.F.M.'s" waiting for me at home. So I gave your subscription department a subscription to worry over.

May I extend my hearty congratulations to your resuming more frequent publication, and wish you the utmost success in the future?

Sincerely,

ROSCO WRIGHT.

Rosco E. Wright HA 1/c
Hdq. Co. 3rd Bn. 27th Marines
Kyushu, Japan

PLENTY OF GOOD STUFF

I thought at first that your new policy would make the magazine boresome because most of the really good novels were published in magazine form, but after reading the "Ancient Allan" I know I was badly mistaken. There's still plenty of good stuff in the old bucket. Haggard created a great character when he invented Allan Quatermain. Why not publish Haggard's "She" if it wasn't put into mag. form yet? Dunsany's "Hashish Man" was a spectacular short-short to round out a great issue.

The illustration for the "Hashish Man" looked a little old style and not up to par with the other pics. of the issue. Lawrence did a great job illustrating Haggard's story. The full page illustrations were especially good. He comes the closest to Finlay than anyone who is illustrating S.F. mags, now.

The ending of the war will bring better quality stuff into the pulp field.

Of late your covers are getting drabby. They're not lively enough. I would also like to see a good interplanetary novel for a change to add some spice to the magazine.

Attention Fans: I want to dispose of my entire fantasy and science fiction collection as a whole.

If you are interested in buying a well-rounded collection, get in touch with me.

Sincerely,

BERNARD SACKS.

1229 So. Lawndale Ave.,
Chicago (23), Ill.

(Continued on page 115)

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The Willows

By Algernon Blackwood

Unknowing, they strayed into a last Pagan citadel, and brought down upon themselves the soul-chilling fury of Nature's terrible, dethroned gods.

AFTER leaving Vienna, and long before you come to Buda-Pesth, the Danube enters a region of singular loneliness and desolation, where its waters spread away on all sides regardless of a main channel, and the country becomes a swamp for miles upon miles, covered by a vast sea of low willow-bushes. On the big maps this deserted area is painted in a fluffy blue, growing fainter in colour as it leaves the banks, and across it may be seen in large straggling letters the word *Sümpfe*, meaning marshes.

In high flood this great acreage of sand, shingle-beds, and willow grown islands is almost topped by the water, but in normal seasons the bushes bend and rustle in the free winds, showing their silver leaves to the sunshine in an ever-moving plain of bewildering beauty. These willows never attain to the dignity of trees; they have no rigid trunks; they remain humble bushes, with rounded tops and soft outline, swaying on slender stems that answer to the least pressure of the wind; supple as grasses, and so continually shifting that they somehow give the impression that the entire plain is moving and *alive*. For the wind sends waves rising and falling over the whole surface, waves of leaves instead of waves of water, green swells like the sea, too, until the branches turn and lift, and then silvery white as their under-side turns to the sun.

Happy to slip beyond the control of the stern banks, the Danube here wanders about at will among the intricate network of channels intersecting the islands everywhere with broad avenues down which the waters pour with a shouting sound; making whirlpools, eddies, and foaming rapids; tearing at the sandy banks; carrying away masses of shore and willow-clumps; and forming new islands innumerable which shift daily in size and shape and possess at best an impermanent life, since the flood-time obliterates their very existence.

Properly speaking, this fascinating part of the river's life begins soon after leaving Pressburg, and we, in our Canadian canoe, with gipsy tent and frying-pan on board, reached it on the crest of a rising flood about mid-July. That very same morning, when the sky was reddening before sunrise, we had slipped swiftly through still-sleeping Vienna, leaving it a couple of hours later a mere patch of smoke against the blue hills of the Wienerwald on the horizon; we had breakfasted below Fischeramend under a grove of birch trees roaring in the wind; and had then swept on the tearing current past Orth, Hainburg, Petronell (the old Roman Carnuntum of Marcus Aurelius,) and so under the frowning heights of Theben on a spur of the Carpathians, where the March steals in quietly from the left and the frontier is crossed between Austria and Hungary.

Racing along at twelve kilometres an hour soon took us well into Hungary, and the muddy waters—sure sign of flood—sent us aground on many a shingle-bed, and twisted us like a cork in many a sudden belching whirlpool before the towers of Pressburg (Hungarian, Poszóny) showed against the sky; and then the canoe, leaping like a spirited horse, flew at top speed under the grey walls, negotiated safely the sunken chain of the Fliegende Brücke ferry, turned the corner sharply to the left, and plunged on yellow foam into the wilderness of islands, sand-banks, and swamp-land beyond—the land of the willows.

The change came suddenly, as when a series of bioscope pictures snaps down on the streets of a town and shifts without warning into the scenery of lake and forest. We entered the land of desolation on wings, and in less than half an hour there was neither boat nor fishing-hut nor red roof, nor any single sign of human habitation and civilization within sight. The sense of remoteness from the world of

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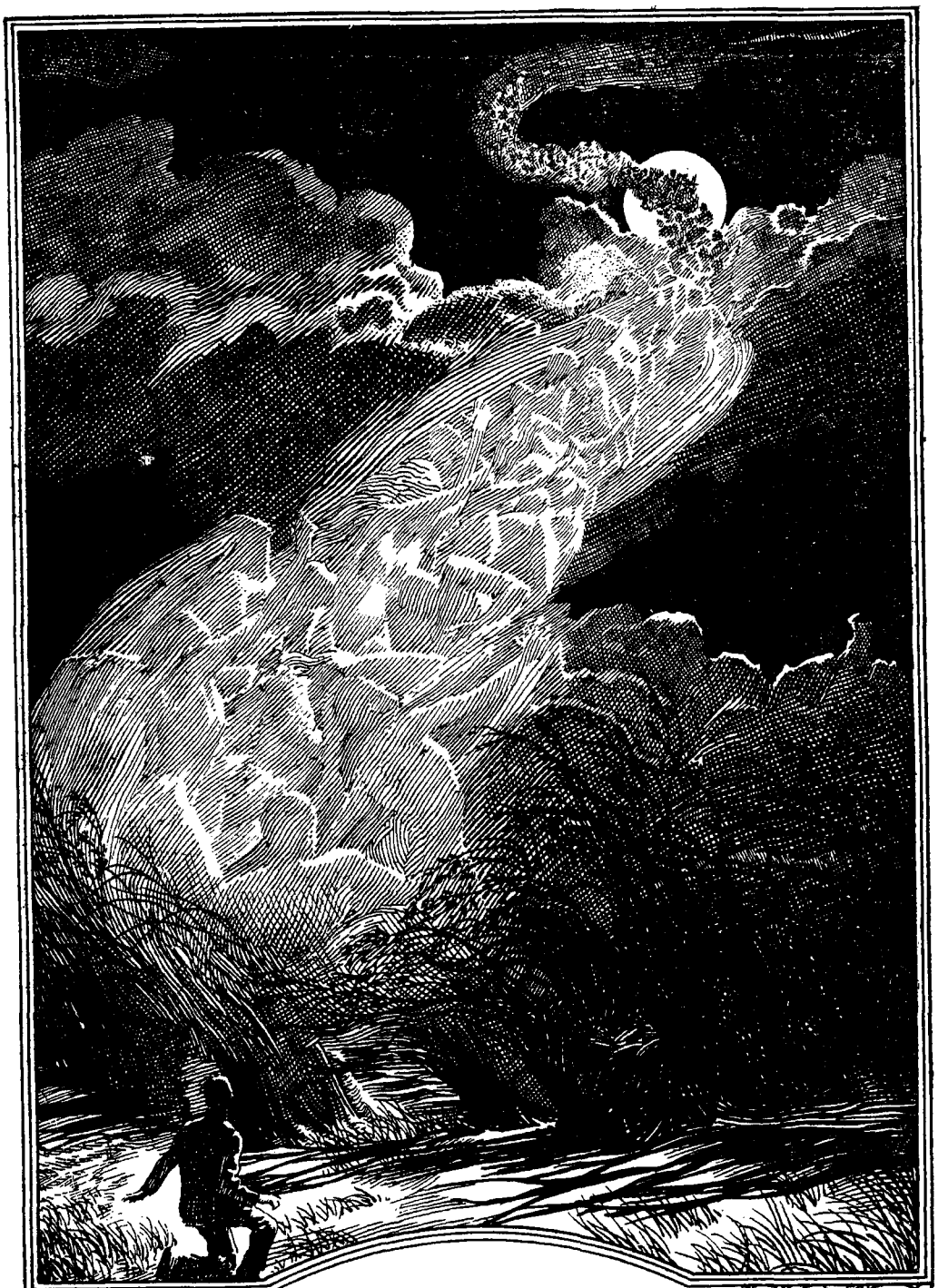

It seemed that they moved, and that they awaited only the great wind which would finally start them a-running.

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human kind, the utter isolation, the fascination of this singular world of willows, winds, and waters, instantly laid its spell upon us both, so that we allowed laughingly to one another that we ought by rights to have held some special kind of passport to admit us, and that we had, somewhat audaciously, come without asking leave into a separate little kingdom of wonder and magic—a kingdom that was reserved for the use of others who had a right to it, with everywhere unwritten warnings to trespassers for those who had the imagination to discover them.

THOUGH still early in the afternoon, the ceaseless buffetings of a most tempestuous wind made us feel weary, and we at once began casting about for a suitable camping-ground for the night. But the bewildering character of the islands made landing difficult; the swirling flood carried us in-shore and then swept us out again; the willow branches tore our hands as we seized them to stop the canoe, and we pulled many a yard of sandy bank into the water before at length we shot with a great sideways blow from the wind into a backwater and managed to beach the bows in a cloud of spray. Then we lay panting and laughing after our exertions on hot yellow sand, sheltered from the wind, and in the full blaze of a scorching sun, a cloudless blue sky above, and an immense army of dancing, shouting willow bushes closing in from all sides, shining with spray and clapping their thousand little hands as though to applaud the success of our efforts.

"What a river!" I said to my companion, thinking of all the way we had travelled from the source in the Black Forest, and how he had often been obliged to wade and push in the upper shallows at the beginning of June.

"Won't stand much nonsense now, will it?" he said, pulling the canoe a little farther into safety up the sand, and then composing himself for a nap.

I lay by his side, happy and peaceful in the bath of the elements—water, wind, sand, and the great fire of the sun—thinking of the long journey that lay behind us, and of the great stretch before us to the Black Sea, and how lucky I was to have such a delightful and charming travelling companion as my friend, the Swede.

We had made many similar journeys together, but the Danube, more than any other river I knew, impressed us from the very beginning with its *aliveness*. From its tiny bubbling entry into the world among the pinewood gardens of Donaueschingen, until this moment when it began to play the great river-game of losing itself among the deserted swamps, unobserved, unrestrained, it had seemed to us like following the growth of some living creature. Sleepy at first, but later developing violent desires as it became conscious of its deep soul, it rolled, like some huge fluid being, through all the countries we had passed, holding our little craft on its mighty shoulders, playing roughly with us sometimes, yet always friendly and well-meaning, till at length we had come inevitably to regard it as a Great Personage.

How, indeed, could it be otherwise, since it told us so much of its secret life? At night we heard it singing to the moon as we lay in our tent, uttering that odd sibilant note peculiar to itself and said to be caused by the rapid tearing of the pebbles along its bed, so great is its hurrying speed. We knew, too, the voice of its gurgling whirlpools, suddenly bubbling up on a surface previously quite calm; the roar of its shallows and swift rapids; its constant steady thundering below all mere surface sounds; and that ceaseless tearing of its icy waters at the banks. How it stood up and shouted when the rains fell flat upon its face! And how its laughter roared out when the wind blew upstream and tried to stop its growing speed! We knew all its sounds and voices, its tumblings and foamings, its unnecessary splashing against the bridges; that self-conscious chatter when there were hills to look on; the affected dignity of its speech when it passed through the little towns, far too important to laugh; and all these faint, sweet whisperings when the sun caught it fairly in some slow curve and poured down upon it till the steam rose.

It was full of tricks, too, in its early life before the great world knew it. There were places in the upper reaches among the Swabian forests, when yet the first whispers of its destiny had not reached it, where it elected to disappear through holes in the ground, to appear again on the other side of the porous limestone hills and start a new river with another name; leaving, too, so little water in its own bed that we had to climb out and wade and push the canoe through miles of shallows.

And a chief pleasure, in those early days of its irresponsible youth, was to lie low, like Brer Fox, just before the little turbulent tributaries came to join in from the Alps, and to refuse to acknowledge

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them when in, but to run for miles side by side, the dividing line well marked, the very levels different, the Danube utterly declining to recognize the newcomer. Below Passau, however, it gave up this particular trick, for there the Inn comes in with a thundering power impossible to ignore, and so pushes and incommodes the parent river that there is hardly room for them in the long twisting gorge that follows, and the Danube is shoved this way and that against the cliffs, and forced to hurry itself with great waves and much dashing to and fro in order to get through in time. And during the fight our canoe slipped down from its shoulders to its breast, and had the time of its life among the struggling waves. But the Inn taught the old river a lesson, and after Passau it no longer pretended to ignore new arrivals.

This was many days back, of course, and since then we had come to know other aspects of the great creature, and across the Bavarian wheat plain of Straubing she wandered so slowly under the blazing June sun that we could well imagine only the surface inches were water, while below there moved, concealed as by a silken mantle, a whole army of Undines, passing silently and unseen down to the sea, and very leisurely too, lest they be discovered.

Much, too, we forgave her because of her friendliness to the birds and animals that haunted the shores. Cormorants lined the banks in lonely places in rows like short black palings; grey crows crowded the shingle-beds; storks stood fishing in the vistas of shallower water that opened up between the islands, and hawks, swans, and marsh birds of all sorts filled the air with glinting wings and singing, petulant cries. It was impossible to feel annoyed with the river's vagaries after seeing a deer leap with a splash into the water at sunrise and swim past the bows of the canoe; and often we saw fawns peering at us from the underbrush, or looked straight into the brown eyes of a stag as we charged full tilt round a corner and entered another reach of the river. Foxes, too, everywhere haunted the banks, tripping daintily among the driftwood and disappearing so suddenly that it was impossible to see how they managed it.

But now, after leaving Pressburg, everything changed a little, and the Danube became more serious. It ceased trifling. It was half-way to the Black Sea, within scenting distance almost of other, stranger countries where no tricks would be permitted or understood. It became suddenly grown-up, and claimed our respect and even our awe. It broke out into three arms, for one thing, that only met again a hundred kilometres farther down, and for a canoe there were no indications which one was intended to be followed.

"If you take a side channel," said the Hungarian officer we met in the Pressburg shop while buying provisions, "you may find yourselves, when the flood subsides, forty miles from anywhere, high and dry, and you may easily starve. There are no people, no farms, no fishermen. I warn you not to continue. The river, too, is still rising, and this wind will increase."

The rising river did not alarm us in the least, but the matter of being left high and dry by a sudden subsidence of the waters might be serious, and we had consequently laid in an extra stock of provisions. For the rest, the officer's prophecy held true, and the wind, blowing down a perfectly clear sky, increased steadily till it reached the dignity of a westerly gale.

It was earlier than usual when we camped, for the sun was a good hour or two from the horizon, and leaving my friend still asleep on the hot sand, I wandered about in desultory examination of our hotel. The island, I found, was less than an acre in extent, a mere sandy bank standing some two or three feet above the level of the river. The far end, pointing into the sunset, was covered with flying spray which the tremendous wind drove off the crests of the broken waves. It was triangular in shape, with the apex up stream.

I stood there for several minutes, watching the impetuous crimson flood bearing down with a shouting roar, dashing in waves against the bank as though to sweep it bodily away, and then swirling by in two foaming streams on either side. The ground seemed to shake with the shock and rush, while the furious movement of the willow bushes as the wind poured over them increased the curious illusion that the island itself actually moved. Above, for a mile or two, I could see the great river descending upon me: it was like looking up the slope of a sliding hill, white with foam, and leaping up everywhere to show itself to the sun.

The rest of the island was too thickly grown with willows to make walking pleasant, but I made the tour, nevertheless. From the lower end the light, of course, changed, and the river looked dark and angry. Only the backs of the flying waves

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were visible, streaked with foam, and pushed forcibly by the great puffs of wind that fell upon them from behind. For a short mile it was visible, pouring in and out among the islands, and then disappearing with a huge sweep into the willows, which closed about it like a herd of monstrous antediluvian creatures crowding down to drink. They made me think of gigantic sponge-like growths that sucked the river up into themselves. They caused it to vanish from sight. They herded there together in such overpowering numbers.

ALTOGETHER it was an impressive scene, with its utter loneliness, its bizarre suggestion; and as I gazed, long and curiously, a singular emotion began to stir somewhere in the depths of me. Midway in my delight of the wild beauty, there crept, unbidden and unexplained, a feeling of disquietude, almost of alarm.

A rising river, perhaps, always suggests something of the ominous: many of the little islands I saw before me would probably have been swept away by the morning; this resistless, thundering flood of water touched the sense of awe. Yet I was aware that my uneasiness lay deeper far than the emotions of awe and wonder. It was not that I felt. Nor had it directly to do with the power of the driving wind—this shouting hurricane that might almost carry up a few acres of willows into the air and scatter them like so much chaff over the landscape. The wind was simply enjoying itself, for nothing rose out of the flat landscape to stop it, and I was conscious of sharing its great game with a kind of pleasurable excitement. Yet this novel emotion had nothing to do with the wind. Indeed, so vague was the sense of distress I experienced, that it was impossible to trace it to its source and deal with it accordingly, though I was aware somehow that it had to do with my realization of our utter insignificance before this unrestrained power of the elements about me. The huge-grown river had something to do with it too—a vague, unpleasant idea that we had somehow trifled with these great elemental forces in whose power we lay helpless every hour of the day and night. For here, indeed, they were gigantically at play together, and the sight appealed to the imagination.

But my emotion, so far as I could understand it, seemed to attach itself more particularly to the willow bushes, to these acres and acres of willows, crowding, so thickly growing there, swarming everywhere the eye could reach, pressing upon the river as though to suffocate it, standing in dense array mile after mile beneath the sky, watching, waiting, listening. And, apart quite from the elements, the willows connected themselves subtly with my malaise, attacking the mind insidiously somehow by reason of their vast numbers, and contriving in some way or other to represent to the imagination a new and mighty power, a power, moreover, not altogether friendly to us.

Great revelations of nature, of course, never fail to impress in one way or another, and I was no stranger to moods of the kind. Mountains overawe and oceans terrify, while the mystery of great forests exercises a spell peculiarly its own. But all these, at one point or another, somewhere link on intimately with human life and human experience. They stir comprehensible, even if alarming, emotions. They tend on the whole to exalt.

With this multitude of willows, however, it was something far different, I felt. Some essence emanated from them that besieged the heart. A sense of awe awakened, true, but of awe touched somewhere by a vague terror. Their serried ranks, growing everywhere darker about me as the shadows deepened, moving furiously yet softly in the wind, woke in me the curious and unwelcome suggestion that we had trespassed here upon the borders of an alien world, a world where we were intruders, a world where we were not wanted or invited to remain—where we ran grave risks perhaps!

The feeling, however, though it refused to yield its meaning entirely to analysis, did not at the time trouble me by passing into menace. Yet it never left me quite, even during the very practical business of putting up the tent in a hurricane of wind and building a fire for the stew-pot. It remained, just enough to bother and perplex, and to rob a most delightful camping-ground of a good portion of its charm. To my companion, however, I said nothing, for he was a man I considered devoid of imagination. In the first place, I could never have explained to him what I meant, and in the second, he would have laughed stupidly at me if I had.

There was a slight depression in the centre of the island, and here we pitched the tent. The surrounding willows broke the wind a bit.

"A poor camp," observed the imperturbable Swede when at last the tent stood

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upright; "no stones and precious little firewood. I'm for moving on early to-morrow—eh? This sand won't hold anything."

But the experience of a collapsing tent at midnight had taught us many devices, and we made the cosy gipsy house as safe as possible, and then set about collecting a store of wood to last till bed-time. Willow bushes drop no branches, and driftwood was our only source of supply. We hunted the shores pretty thoroughly. Everywhere the banks were crumbling as the rising flood tore at them and carried away great portions with a splash and a gurgle.

"The island's much smaller than when we landed," said the accurate Swede. "It won't last long at this rate. We'd better drag the canoe close to the tent, and be ready to start at a moment's notice. *I* shall sleep in my clothes."

He was a little distance off, climbing along the bank, and I heard his rather jolly laugh as he spoke.

"By Jove!" I heard him call, a moment later, and turned to see what had caused his exclamation. But for the moment he was hidden by the willows, and I could not find him.

"What in the world's this?" I heard him cry again, and this time his voice had become serious.

I ran up quickly and joined him on the bank. He was looking over the river, pointing at something in the water.

"Good heavens, it's a man's body!" he cried excitedly. "Look!"

A black thing, turning over and over in the foaming waves, swept rapidly past. It kept disappearing and coming up to the surface again. It was about twenty feet from the shore, and just as it was opposite to where we stood it lurched round and looked straight at us. We saw its eyes reflecting the sunset, and gleaming an odd yellow as the body turned over. Then it gave a swift, gulping plunge, and dived out of sight in a flash.

"An otter, by gad!" we exclaimed in the same breath, laughing.

It *was* an otter, alive, and out on the hunt; yet it had looked exactly like the body of a drowned man turning helplessly in the current. Far below it came to the surface once again, and we saw its black skin, wet and shining in the sunlight.

Then, too, just as we turned back, our arms full of driftwood, another thing happened to recall us to the river bank. This time it really was a man, and what was more, a man in a boat. Now a small boat on the Danube was an unusual sight at any time, but here in this deserted region, and at flood times it was so unexpected as to constitute a real event. We stood and stared.

WHETHER it was due to the slanting sunlight, or the refraction from the wonderfully illumined water, I cannot say, but, whatever the cause, I found it difficult to focus my sight properly upon the flying apparition. It seemed, however, to be a man standing upright in a sort of flat-bottomed boat, steering with a long oar, and being carried down the opposite shore at a tremendous pace. He apparently was looking across in our direction, but the distance was too great and the light too uncertain for us to make out very plainly what he was about. It seemed to me that he was gesticulating and making signs at us. His voice came across the water to us shouting something furiously, but the wind drowned it so that no single word was audible. There was something curious about the whole appearance—man, boat, signs, voice—that made an impression on me out of all proportion to its cause.

"He's crossing himself!" I cried. "Look, he's making the sign of the Cross!"

"I believe you're right," the Swede said, shading his eyes with his hand and watching the man out of sight. He seemed to be gone in a moment, melting away down there into the sea of willows where the sun caught them in the bend of the river and turned them into a great crimson wall of beauty. Mist, too, had begun to rise, so that the air was hazy.

"But what in the world is he doing at nightfall on this flooded river?" I said, half to myself. "Where is he going at such a time, and what did he mean by his signs and shouting? D'you think he wished to warn us about something?"

"He saw our smoke, and thought we were spirits probably," laughed my companion. "These Hungarians believe in all sorts of rubbish: you remember the shopwoman at Pressburg warning us that no one ever landed here because it belonged to some sort of beings outside man's world! I suppose they believe in fairies and elementals, possibly demons too. That peasant in the boat saw people on the islands for the first time in his life," he added, after a slight pause, "and it scared him, that's all."

The Swede's tone of voice was not convincing, and his manner lacked something that was usually there. I noted the change

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instantly while he talked, though without being able to label it precisely.

"If they had enough imagination," I laughed loudly—I remember trying to make as much *noise* as I could—"they might well people a place like this with the old gods of antiquity. The Romans must have haunted all this region more or less with their shrines and sacred groves and elemental deities."

The subject dropped and we returned to our stew-pot, for my friend was not given to imaginative conversation as a rule. Moreover, just then I remember feeling distinctly glad that he was not imaginative; his stolid, practical nature suddenly seemed to me welcome and comforting. It was an admirable temperament, I felt: he could steer down rapids like a red Indian, shoot dangerous bridges and whirlpools better than any white man I ever saw in a canoe. He was a grand fellow for an adventurous trip, a tower of strength when untoward things happened. I looked at his strong face and light curly hair as he staggered along under his pile of driftwood (twice the size of mine!), and I experienced a feeling of relief. Yes, I was distinctly glad just then that the Swede was—what he was, and that he never made remarks that suggested more than they said.

"The river's still rising, though," he added, as if following out some thoughts of his own, and dropping his load with a gasp. "This island will be under water in two days if it goes on."

"I wish the *wind* would go down," I said. "I don't care a fig for the river."

The flood, indeed, had no terrors for us; we could get off at ten minutes' notice, and the more water the better we liked it. It meant an increasing current and the obliteration of the treacherous shingle-beds that so often threatened to tear the bottom out of our canoe.

Contrary to our expectations, the wind did not go down with the sun. It seemed to increase with the darkness, howling overhead and shaking the willows round us like straws. Curious sounds accompanied it sometimes, like the explosion of heavy guns, and it fell upon the water and the island in great flat blows of immense power. It made me think of the sounds a planet must make, could we only hear it, driving along through space. But the sky kept wholly clear of clouds, and soon after supper the full moon rose up in the east and covered the river and the plain of shouting willows with a light like the day.

We lay on the sandy patch beside the fire, smoking, listening to the noises of the night around us, and talking happily of the journey we had already made, and of our plans ahead. The map lay spread in the door of the tent, but the high wind made it hard to study, and presently we lowered the curtain and extinguished the lantern. The firelight was enough to smoke and see each other's faces by, and the sparks flew about overhead like fireworks. A few yards beyond, the river gurgled and hissed, and from time to time a heavy splash announced the falling away of further portions of the bank.

Our talk, I noticed, had to do with the far-away scenes and incidents of our first camps in the Black Forest, or of other subjects altogether remote from the present setting, for neither of us spoke of the actual moment more than was necessary—almost as though we had agreed tacitly to avoid discussion of the camp and its incidents. Neither the otter nor the boatman, for instance, received the honour of a single mention, though ordinarily these would have furnished discussion for the greater part of the evening. They were, of course, distinct events in such a place.

The scarcity of wood made it a business to keep the fire going, for the wind, that drove the smoke in our faces wherever we sat, helped at the same time to make a forced draught. We took it in turn to make foraging expeditions into the darkness, and the quantity the Swede brought back always made me feel that he took an absurdly long time finding it; for the fact was I did not care much about being left alone, and yet it always seemed to be my turn to grub about among the bushes or scramble along the slippery banks in the moonlight.

The long day's battle with the wind and the water—such wind and such water!—had tired us both, and an early bed was the obvious programme. Yet neither of us made the move for the tent. We lay there, tending the fire, talking in desultory fashion, peering about us into the dense willow bushes, and listening to the thunder of wind and river. The loneliness of the place had entered our very bones, and silence seemed natural, for after a bit the sound of our voices became a trifle unreal and forced; whispering would have been the fitting mode of communication, I felt, and the human voice, always rather absurd amid the roar of the elements, now carried with it something almost illegitimate. It was like talking out loud in

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church, or in some place where it was not lawful, perhaps not quite *safe*, to be overheard.

THE eeriness of this lonely island, set among a million willows, swept by a hurricane, and surrounded by hurrying deep waters, touched us both, I fancy. Untrodden by man, almost unknown to man, it lay there beneath the moon, remote from human influence, on the frontier of another world, an alien world, a world tenanted by willows only and the souls of willows. And we, in our rashness, had dared to invade it, even to make use of it! Something more than the power of its mystery stirred in me as I lay on the sand, feet to fire, and peered up through the leaves at the stars. For the last time I rose to get firewood.

"When this has burnt up," I said firmly, "I shall turn in," and my companion watched me lazily as I moved off into the surrounding shadows.

For an unimaginative man I thought he seemed unusually receptive that night, unusually open to suggestion of things other than sensory. He too was touched by the beauty and loneliness of the place. I was not altogether pleased, I remember, to recognize this slight change in him, and instead of immediately collecting sticks, I made my way to the far point of the island where the moonlight on plain and river could be seen to better advantage. The desire to be alone had come suddenly upon me; my former dread returned in force; there was a vague feeling in me I wished to face and probe to the bottom.

When I reached the point of sand jutting out among the waves, the spell of the place descended upon me with a positive shock. No mere "scenery" could have produced such an effect. There was something more here, something to alarm.

I gazed across the waste of wild waters; I watched the whispering willows; I heard the ceaseless beating of the tireless wind; and, one and all, each in its own way, stirred in me this sensation of a strange distress. But the *willows* especially; for ever they went on chattering and talking among themselves, laughing a little, shrilly crying out, sometimes sighing—but what it was they made so much to-do about belonged to the secret life of the great plain they inhabited. And it was utterly alien to the world I knew, or to that of the wild yet kindly elements. They made me think of a host of beings from another plane of life, another evolution altogether, perhaps, all discussing a mystery known only to themselves. I watched them moving busily together, oddly shaking their big bushy heads, twirling their myriad leaves even when there was no wind. They moved of their own will as though alive, and they touched, by some incalculable method, my own keen sense of the *horrible*.

There they stood in the moonlight, like a vast army surrounding our camp, shaking their innumerable silver spears defiantly, formed all ready for an attack.

The psychology of places, for some imaginations at least, is very vivid; for the wanderer, especially, camps have their "note" either of welcome or rejection. At first it may not always be apparent, because the busy preparations of tent and cooking prevent, but with the first pause —after supper usually—it comes and announces itself. And the note of this willow-camp now became unmistakably plain to me: we were interlopers, trespassers; we were not welcomed. The sense of unfamiliarity grew upon me as I stood there watching. We touched the frontier of a region where our presence was resented. For a night's lodging we might perhaps be tolerated; but for a prolonged and inquisitive stay— No! by all the gods of the trees and the wilderness, no! We were the first human influences upon this island, and we were not wanted. *The willows were against us.*

Strange thoughts like these, bizarre fancies, borne I know not whence, found lodgment in my mind as I stood listening. What, I thought, if, after all, these crouching willows proved to be alive; if suddenly they should rise up, like a swarm of living creatures, marshalled by the gods whose territory we had invaded, sweep towards us off the vast swamps, booming overhead in the night—and then *settle down!* As I looked it was so easy to imagine they actually moved, crept nearer, retreated a little, huddled together in masses, hostile, waiting for the great wind that should finally start them a-running. I could have sworn their aspect changed a little, and their ranks deepened and pressed more closely together.

The melancholy shrill cry of a night-bird sounded overhead, and suddenly I nearly lost my balance as the piece of bank I stood upon fell with a great splash into the river, undermined by the flood. I stepped back just in time, and went on hunting for firewood again, half laughing at the odd fancies that crowded so thickly

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into my mind and cast their spell upon me. I recalled the Swede's remark about moving on next day, and I was just thinking that I fully agreed with him, when I turned with a start and saw the subject of my thoughts standing immediately in front of me. He was quite close. The roar of the elements had covered his approach.

"You've been gone so long," he shouted above the wind, "I thought something must have happened to you."

But there was that in his tone, and a certain look in his face as well, that conveyed to me more than his actual words, and in a flash I understood the real reason for his coming. It was because the spell of the place had entered his soul too, and he did not like being alone.

"River still rising," he cried, pointing to the flood in the moonlight, "and the wind's simply awful."

He always said the same things, but it was the cry for companionship that gave the real importance to his words.

"Lucky," I cried back, "our tent's in the hollow. I think it'll hold all right." I added something about the difficulty of finding wood, in order to explain my absence, but the wind caught my words and flung them across the river, so that he did not hear, but just looked at me through the branches, nodding his head.

"Lucky if we get away without disaster!" he shouted, or words to that effect; and I remember feeling half angry with him for putting the thought into words, for it was exactly what I felt myself. There was disaster impending somewhere, and the sense of presentiment lay unpleasantly upon me.

We went back to the fire and made a final blaze, poking it up with our feet. We took a last look round. But for the wind the heat would have been unpleasant. I put this thought into words, and I remember my friend's reply struck me oddly: that he would rather have the heat, the ordinary July weather, than this "diabolical wind".

Everything was snug for the night; the canoe lying turned over beside the tent, with both yellow paddles beneath her; the provision sack hanging from a willow-stem, and the washed-up dishes removed to a safe distance from the fire, all ready for the morning meal.

We smothered the embers of the fire with sand, and then turned in. The flap of the tent door was up, and I saw the branches and the stars and the white moonlight. The shaking willows and the heavy buffetings of the wind against our taut little house were the last things I remembered as sleep came down and covered all with its soft and delicious forgetfulness.

SUDDENLY I found myself lying awake, peering from my sandy mattress through the door of the tent. I looked at my watch pinned against the canvas, and saw by the bright moonlight that it was past twelve o'clock—the threshold of a new day—and I had therefore slept a couple of hours. The Swede was asleep still beside me; the wind howled as before; something plucked at my heart and made me feel afraid. There was a sense of disturbance in my immediate neighborhood.

I sat up quickly and looked out. The trees were swaying violently to and fro as the gusts smote them, but our little bit of green canvas lay snugly safe in the hollow, for the wind passed over it without meeting enough resistance to make it vicious. The feeling of disquietude did not pass, however, and I crawled quietly out of the tent to see if our belongings were safe. I moved carefully so as not to waken my companion. A curious excitement was on me.

I was half-way out, kneeling on all fours, when my eye first took in that the tops of the bushes opposite, with their moving tracery of leaves, made shapes against the sky. I sat back on my haunches and stared. It was incredible, surely, but there, opposite and slightly above me, were shapes of some indeterminate sort among the willows, and as the branches swayed in the wind they seemed to group themselves about these shapes, forming a series of monstrous outlines that shifted rapidly beneath the moon. Close, about fifty feet in front of me, I saw these things.

My first instinct was to awaken my companion, that he too might see them, but something made me hesitate—the sudden realization, probably, that I should not welcome corroboration; and meanwhile I crouched there staring in amazement with smarting eyes. I was wide awake. I remember saying to myself that I was *not* dreaming.

They first became properly visible, these huge figures, just within the tops of the bushes—immense, bronze-colored, moving, and wholly independent of the swaying of the branches. I saw them plainly and noted, now I came to examine them more calmly, that they were very much larger

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than human, and indeed that something in their appearance proclaimed them to be not human at all. Certainly they were not merely the moving tracery of the branches against the moonlight. They shifted independently. They rose upwards in a continuous stream from earth to sky, vanishing utterly as soon as they reached the dark of the sky. They were interlaced one with another, making a great column, and I saw their limbs and huge bodies melting in and out of each other, forming this serpentine line that bent and swayed and twisted spirally with the contortions of the wind-tossed trees. They were nude, fluid shapes, passing up the bushes, *within* the leaves almost—rising up in a living column into the heavens. Their faces I never could see. Unceasingly they poured upwards, swaying in great bending curves, with a hue of dull bronze upon their skins.

I stared, trying to force every atom of vision from my eyes. For a long time I thought they *must* every moment disappear and resolve themselves into the movements of the branches and prove to be an optical illusion. I searched everywhere for a proof of reality, when all the while I understood quite well that the standard of reality had changed. For the longer I looked the more certain I became that these figures were real and living, though perhaps not according to the standards that the camera and the biologist would insist upon.

Far from feeling fear, I was possessed with a sense of awe and wonder such as I have never known. I seemed to be gazing at the personified elemental forces of this haunted and primeval region. Our intrusion had stirred the powers of the place into activity. It was we who were the cause of the disturbance, and my brain filled to bursting with stories and legends of the spirits and deities of places that have been acknowledged and worshipped by men in all ages of the world's history. But, before I could arrive at any possible explanation, something impelled me to go farther out, and I crept forward on to the sand and stood upright. I felt the ground still warm under my bare feet; the wind tore at my hair and face; and the sound of the river burst upon my ears with a sudden roar. These things, I knew, were real, and proved that my senses were acting normally. Yet the figures still rose from earth to heaven, silent, majestically, in a great spiral of grace and strength that overwhelmed me at length with a genuine deep emotion of worship. I felt that I must fall down and worship—absolutely worship.

Perhaps in another minute I might have done so, when a gust of wind swept against me with such force that it blew me sideways, and I nearly stumbled and fell. It seemed to shake the dream violently out of me. At least it gave me another point of view somehow. The figures still remained, still ascended into heaven from the heart of the night, but my reason at last began to assert itself. It must be a subjective experience, I argued—none the less real for that, but still subjective. The moonlight and the branches combined to work out these pictures upon the mirror of my imagination, and for some reason I projected them outwards and made them appear objective. I knew this must be the case, of course. I was the subject of a vivid and interesting hallucination. I took courage, and began to move forward across the open patches of sand. By jove, though, was it all hallucination? Was it merely subjective? Did not my reason argue in the old futile way from the little standard of the known?

I only know that great column of figures ascended darkly into the sky for what seemed a very long period of time, and with a very complete measure of reality as most men are accustomed to gauge reality. Then suddenly they were gone!

And, once they were gone and the immediate wonder of their great presence had passed, fear came down upon me with a cold rush. The esoteric meaning of this lonely and haunted region suddenly flamed up within me, and I began to tremble dreadfully. I took a quick look round—a look of horror that came near to panic—calculating vainly ways of escape; and then, realizing how helpless I was to achieve anything really effective, I crept back silently into the tent and lay down again upon my sandy mattress, first lowering the door-curtain to shut out the willows in the moonlight, and then burying my head as deeply as possible beneath the blankets to deaden the sound of the terrifying wind.

AS THOUGH further to convince me that I had not been dreaming, I remember that it was a long time before I fell again into a troubled and restless sleep; and even then only the upper crust of me slept, and underneath there was something that never quite lost consciousness, but lay alert and on the watch.

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But this second time I jumped up with a genuine start of terror. It was neither the wind nor the river that woke me, but the slow approach of something that caused the sleeping portion of me to grow smaller and smaller till at last it vanished altogether, and I found myself sitting bolt upright—listening.

Outside there was a sound of multitudinous little patterings. They had been coming, I was aware, for a long time, and in my sleep they had first become audible. I sat there nervously wide awake as though I had not slept at all. It seemed to me that my breathing came with difficulty, and that there was a great weight upon the surface of my body. In spite of the hot night, I felt clammy with cold and shivered. Something surely was pressing steadily against the sides of the tent and weighing down upon it from above. Was it the body of the wind? Was this the pattering rain, the dripping of the leaves? The spray blown from the river by the wind and gathering in big drops? I thought quickly of a dozen things.

Then suddenly the explanation leaped into my mind: a bough from the poplar, the only large tree on the island, had fallen with the wind. Still half caught by the other branches, it would fall with the next gust and crush us, and meanwhile its leaves brushed and tapped upon the tight canvas surface of the tent. I raised the loose flap and rushed out, calling to the Swede to follow.

But when I got out and stood upright I saw that the tent was free. There was no hanging bough; there was no rain or spray; nothing approached.

A cold, grey light filtered down through the bushes and lay on the faintly gleaming sand. Stars still crowded the sky directly overhead, and the wind howled magnificently, but the fire no longer gave out any glow, and I saw the east reddening in streaks through the trees. Several hours must have passed since I stood there before watching the ascending figures, and the memory of it now came back to me horribly, like an evil dream. Oh, how tired it made me feel, that ceaseless raging wind! Yet, though the deep lassitude of a sleepless night was on me, my nerves were tingling with the activity of an equally tireless apprehension, and all idea of repose was out of the question. The river I saw had risen further. Its thunder filled the air, and a fine spray made itself felt through my thin sleeping shirt.

Yet nowhere did I discover the slightest evidences of anything to cause alarm. This deep, prolonged disturbance in my heart remained wholly unaccounted for.

My companion had not stirred when I called him, and there was no need to waken him now. I looked about me carefully, noting everything: the turned-over canoe; the yellow paddles—two of them, I'm certain; the provision sack and the extra lantern hanging together from the tree; and, crowding everywhere about me, enveloping all, the willows, those endless, shaking willows. A bird uttered its morning cry, and a string of duck passed with whirring flight overhead in the twilight. The sand whirled, dry and stinging, about my bare feet in the wind.

I walked round the tent and then went out a little way into the bush, so that I could see across the river to farther landscape, and the same profound yet indefinable emotion of distress seized upon me again as I saw the interminable sea of bushes stretching to the horizon, looking ghostly and unreal in the wan light of dawn. I walked softly here and there, still puzzling over that odd sound of infinite pattering, and of that pressure upon the tent that had wakened me. It *must* have been the wind, I reflected—the wind beating upon the loose, hot sand, driving the dry particles smartly against the taut canvas—the wind dropping heavily upon our fragile roof.

Yet all the time my nervousness and malaise increased appreciably.

I crossed over to the farther shore and noted how the coast-line had altered in the night, and what masses of sand the river had torn away. I dipped my hands and feet into the cool current, and bathed my forehead. Already there was a glow of sunrise in the sky and the exquisite freshness of coming day. On my way back I passed purposely beneath the very bushes where I had seen the column of figures rising into the air, and midway among the clumps I suddenly found myself overtaken by a sense of vast terror. From the shadows a large figure went swiftly by. Someone passed me, as sure as ever man did. . . .

It was a great staggering blow from the wind that helped me forward again, and once out in the more open space, the sense of terror diminished strangely. The winds were about and walking, I remember saying to myself; for the winds often move like great presences under the trees. And altogether the fear that hovered about me was such an unknown and immense kind

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of fear, so unlike anything I had ever felt before, that it woke a sense of awe and wonder in me that did much to counteract its worst effects; and when I reached a high point in the middle of the island from which I could see the wide stretch of river, crimson in the sunrise, the whole magical beauty of it all was so overpowering that a sort of wild yearning woke in me and almost brought a cry up into the throat.

But this cry found no expression, for as my eyes wandered from the plain beyond to the island round me and noted our little tent half hidden among the willows, a dreadful discovery leaped out at me, compared to which my terror of the walking winds seemed as nothing at all.

For a change, I thought, had somehow come about in the arrangement of the landscape. It was not that my point of vantage gave me a different view, but that an alteration had apparently been effected in the relation of the tent to the willows, and of the willows to the tent. Surely the bushes now crowded much closer—unnecessarily, unpleasantly close. *They had moved nearer.*

Creeping with silent feet over the shifting sands, drawing imperceptibly nearer by soft, unhurried movements, the willows had come closer during the night. But had the wind moved them, or had they moved of themselves? I recalled the sound of infinite small patterings and the pressure upon the tent and upon my own heart that caused me to wake in terror. I swayed for a moment in the wind like a tree, finding it hard to keep my upright position on the sandy hillock. There was a suggestion here of personal agency, of deliberate intention, of aggressive hostility, and it terrified me into a sort of rigidity.

Then the reaction followed quickly. The idea was so bizarre, so absurd, that I felt inclined to laugh. But the laughter came no more readily than the cry, for the knowledge that my mind was so receptive to such dangerous imaginings brought the additional terror that it was through our minds and not through our physical bodies that the attack would come, and was coming.

The wind buffeted me about, and, very quickly it seemed, the sun came up over the horizon, for it was after four o'clock, and I must have stood on that little pinnacle of sand longer than I knew, afraid to come down to close quarters with the willows. I returned quietly, creepily, to the tent, first taking another exhaustive look around and—yes, I confess it—making a few measurements. I paced out on the warm sand the distances between the willows and the tent, making a note of the shortest distance particularly.

I crawled stealthily into my blankets. My companion, to all appearances, still slept soundly, and I was glad that this was so. Provided my experiences were not corroborated, I could find strength somehow to deny them, perhaps. With the daylight I could persuade myself that it was all a subjective hallucination, a fantasy of the night, a projection of the excited imagination.

Nothing further came to disturb me, and I fell asleep almost at once, utterly exhausted, yet still in dread of hearing again that weird sound of multitudinous pattering, or of feeling the pressure upon my heart that had made it difficult to breathe.

THE sun was high in the heavens when my companion woke me from a heavy sleep and announced that the porridge was cooked and there was just time to bathe. The grateful smell of frizzling bacon entered the tent door.

"River still rising," he said, "and several islands out in mid-stream have disappeared altogether. Our own island's much smaller."

"Any wood left?" I asked sleepily.

"The wood and the island will finish tomorrow in a dead heat," he laughed, "but there's enough to last us till then."

I plunged in from the point of the island, which had indeed altered a lot in size and shape during the night, and was swept down in a moment to the landing-place opposite the tent. The water was icy, and the banks flew by like the country from an express train. Bathing under such conditions was an exhilarating operation, and the terror of the night seemed cleansed out of me by a process of evaporation in the brain. The sun was blazing hot; not a cloud showed itself anywhere; the wind, however, had not abated one little jot.

Quite suddenly then the implied meaning of the Swede's words flashed across me, showing that he no longer wished to leave post-haste, and had changed his mind. "Enough to last till tomorrow"—he assumed we should stay on the island another night. It struck me as odd. The night before he was so positive the other way. How had the change come about?

Great crumblings of the banks occurred at breakfast, with heavy splashings and clouds of spray which the wind brought

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into our frying-pan, and my fellow-traveller talked incessantly about the difficulty the Vienna-Pesth steamers must have to find the channel in flood. But the state of his mind interested and impressed me far more than the state of the river or the difficulties of the steamers. He had changed somehow since the evening before. His manner was different—a trifle excited, a trifle shy, with a sort of suspicion about his voice and gestures. I hardly know how to describe it now in cold blood, but at the time I remember being quite certain of one thing—that he had become frightened.

He ate very little breakfast, and for once omitted to smoke his pipe. He had the map spread open beside him, and kept studying its markings.

"We'd better get off sharp in an hour," I said presently, feeling for an opening that must bring him indirectly to a partial confession at any rate. And his answer puzzled me uncomfortably: "Rather! If they'll let us."

"Who'll let us? The elements?" I asked quickly, with affected indifference.

"The powers of this awful place, whoever they are," he replied, keeping his eyes on the map. "The gods are here, if they are anywhere at all in the world."

"The elements are always the true immortals," I replied, laughing as naturally as I could manage, yet knowing quite well that my face reflected my true feelings when he looked up gravely at me and spoke across the smoke:

"We shall be fortunate if we get away without further disaster."

This was exactly what I had dreaded, and I screwed myself up to the point of the direct question. It was like agreeing to allow the dentist to extract the tooth; it *had* to come anyhow in the long run, and the rest was all pretence.

"Further disaster! Why, what's happened?"

"For one thing—the steering paddle's gone," he said quietly.

"The steering paddle gone!" I repeated, greatly excited, for this was our rudder, and the Danube in flood without a rudder was suicide. "But what—"

"And there's a tear in the bottom of the canoe," he added, with a genuine little tremor in his voice.

I continued staring at him, able only to repeat the words in his face somewhat foolishly. There, in the heat of the sun, and on this burning sand, I was aware of a freezing atmosphere descending round us. I got up to follow him, for he merely nodded his head gravely and led the way towards the tent a few yards on the other side of the fireplace. The canoe still lay there as I had last seen her in the night, ribs uppermost, the paddles, or rather, *the* paddle, on the sand beside her.

"There's only one," he said, stooping to pick it up. "And here's the rent in the baseboard."

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him that I had clearly noticed *two* paddles a few hours before, but a second impulse made me think better of it, and I said nothing. I approached to see.

There was a long, finely-made tear in the bottom of the canoe where a little slither of wood had been neatly taken clean out; it looked as if the tooth of a sharp rock or snag had eaten down her length, and investigation showed that the hole went through. Had we launched out in her without observing it we must inevitably have foundered. At first the water would have made the wood swell so as to close the hole, but once out in mid-stream the water must have poured in, and the canoe, never more than two inches above the surface, would have filled and sunk very rapidly.

"There, you see an attempt to prepare a victim for the sacrifice," I heard him saying, more to himself than to me, "two victims rather," he added as he bent over and ran his fingers along the slit.

I began to whistle—a thing I always do unconsciously when utterly nonplussed—and purposely paid no attention to his words. I was determined to consider them foolish.

"It wasn't there last night," he said presently, straightening up from his examination and looking anywhere but at me.

"We must have scratched her in landing, of course," I stopped whistling to say. "The stones are very sharp—"

I stopped abruptly, for at that moment he turned round and met my eye squarely. I knew just as well as he did how impossible my explanation was. There were no stones, to begin with.

"And then there's this to explain too," he added quietly, handing me the paddle and pointing to the blade.

A new and curious emotion spread freezingly over me here as I took and examined it. The blade was scraped down all over, beautifully scraped, as though someone had sandpapered it with care, making it so thin that the first vigorous stroke must

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have snapped it off short at the elbow.

"One of us walked in his sleep and did this thing," I said feebly, "or—or it has been filed by the constant stream of sand particles blown against it by the wind, perhaps."

"Ah," said the Swede, turning away, laughing a little, "you can explain everything!"

"The same wind that caught the steering paddle and flung it so near the bank that it fell in with the next lump that crumbled," I called out after him, absolutely determined to find an explanation for everything he showed me.

"I see," he shouted back, turning his head to look at me before disappearing among the willow bushes.

ONCE alone with these perplexing evidences of personal agency, I think my first thought took the form of "One of us must have done this thing, and it certainly was not I." But my second thought decided how impossible it was to suppose, under all the circumstances, that either of us had done it. That my companion, the trusted friend of a dozen similar expeditions, could have knowingly had a hand in it, was a suggestion not to be entertained for a moment. Equally absurd seemed the explanation that this imperturbable and densely practical nature had suddenly become insane and was busied with insane purposes.

Yet the fact remained that what disturbed me most, and kept fear actively alive even in this blaze of sunshine and wild beauty, was the clear certainty that some curious alterations had come about in his *mind*—that he was nervous, timid, suspicious, aware of goings on he did not speak about, watching a series of secret and hitherto unmentionable events—waiting, in a word, for a climax that he expected, and, I thought, expected very soon. This grew up in my mind intuitively—I hardly knew how.

I made a hurried examination of the tent and its surroundings, but the measurements of the night remained the same. There were deep hollows formed in the sand I now noticed for the first time, basin-shaped and of various depths and sizes, varying from that of a tea-cup to a large bowl. The wind, no doubt, was responsible for these miniature craters, just as it was for lifting the paddle and tossing it towards the water. The rent in the canoe was the only thing that seemed quite inexplicable; and, after all, it *was* conceivable that a sharp point had caught it when we landed. The examination I made of the shore did not assist this theory, but all the same I clung to it with that diminishing portion of my intelligence which I called my "reason". An explanation of some kind was an absolute necessity, just as some working explanation of the universe is necessary—however absurd—to the happiness of every individual who seeks to do his duty in the world and face the problems of life. The simile seemed to me at the time an exact parallel.

I at once set the pitch melting, and presently the Swede joined me at the work, though under the best conditions in the world the canoe could not be safe for travelling till the following day. I drew his attention casually to the hollows in the sand.

"Yes," he said, "I know. They're all over the island. But *you* can explain them, no doubt!"

"Wind, of course," I answered without hesitation. "Have you never watched those little whirlwinds in the street that twist and twirl everything into a circle? This sand's loose enough to yield, that's all."

He made no reply, and we worked on in silence for a bit. I watched him surreptitiously all the time, and I had an idea he was watching me. He seemed, too, to be always listening attentively to something I could not hear, or perhaps for something that he expected to hear, for he kept turning about and staring into the bushes, and up into the sky, and out across the water where it was visible through the openings among the willows. Sometimes he even put his hand to his ear and held it there for several minutes. He said nothing to me, however, about it, and I asked no questions. And meanwhile, as he mended that torn canoe with the skill and address of a red Indian, I was glad to notice his absorption in the work, for there was a vague dread in my heart that he would speak of the changed aspect of the willows. And, if he had noticed *that*, my imagination could no longer be held a sufficient explanation of it.

At length, after a long pause, he began to talk.

"Queer thing," he added in a hurried sort of voice, as though he wanted to say something and get it over. "Queer thing, I mean, about that otter last night."

I had expected something so totally different that he caught me with surprise, and I looked up sharply.

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"Shows how lonely this place is. Otters are awfully shy things—"

"I don't mean that, of course," he interrupted. "I mean—do you think—did you think it really *was* an otter?"

"What else, in the name of Heaven, what else?"

"You know, I saw it before you did, and at first it seemed—so *much* bigger than an otter."

"The sunset as you looked up-stream magnified it, or something," I replied.

He looked at me absently a moment, as though his mind were busy with other thoughts.

"It had such extraordinary yellow eyes," he went on half to himself.

"That was the sun too." I laughed, a trifle boisterously. "I suppose you'll wonder next if that fellow in the boat—"

I suddenly decided not to finish the sentence. He was in the act again of listening, turning his head to the wind, and something in the expression of his face made me halt. The subject dropped, and we went on with our caulking. Apparently he had not noticed my unfinished sentence. Five minutes, later, however, he looked at me across the canoe, the smoking pitch in his hand, his face exceedingly grave.

"I *did* rather wonder, if you want to know," he said slowly, "what that thing in the boat was. I remember thinking at the time it was not a man. The whole business seemed to rise quite suddenly out of the water."

I laughed again boisterously in his face, but this time there was impatience, and a strain of anger too, in my feeling.

"Look here now," I cried, "this place is quite queer enough without going out of our way to imagine things! That boat was an ordinary boat, and the man in it was an ordinary man, and they were both going down-stream as fast as they could lick. And that otter *was* an otter, so don't let's play the fool about it!"

He looked steadily at me with the same grave expression. He was not in the least annoyed. I took courage from his silence.

"And, for Heaven's sake," I went on, "don't keep pretending you hear things, because it only give me the jumps, and there's nothing to hear but the river and this cursed old thundering wind."

"You *fool!*" he answered in a low, shocked voice, "you utter fool. That's just the way all victims talk. As if you didn't understand just as well as I do!" he sneered with scorn in his voice, and a sort of resignation. "The best thing you can do is to keep quiet and try to hold your mind as firm as possible. This feeble attempt at self-deception only makes the truth harder when you're forced to meet it."

MY LITTLE effort was over, and I found nothing more to say, for I knew quite well his words were true, and that *I* was the fool, not *he*. Up to a certain stage in the adventure he kept ahead of me easily, and I think I felt annoyed to be out of it, to be thus proved less psychic, less sensitive than himself to these extraordinary happenings, and half ignorant all the time of what was going on under my very nose. *He knew* from the very beginning, apparently. But at the moment I wholly missed the point of his words about the necessity of there being a victim, and that we ourselves were destined to satisfy the want. I dropped all pretence thenceforward, but thenceforward likewise my fear increased steadily to the climax.

"But you're quite right about one thing," he added, before the subject passed, "and that is that we're wiser not to talk about it, or even to think about it, because what one *thinks* finds expression in words, and what one says, happens."

That afternoon, while the canoe dried and hardened, we spent trying to fish, testing the leak, collecting wood, and watching the enormous flood of rising water. Masses of driftwood swept near our shores sometimes, and we fished for them with long willow branches. The island grew perceptibly smaller as the banks were torn away with great gulps and splashes. The weather kept brilliantly fine till about four o'clock, and then for the first time for three days the wind showed signs of abating. Clouds began to gather in the south-west, spreading thence slowly over the sky.

This lessening of the wind came as a great relief, for the incessant roaring, banging, and thundering had irritated our nerves. Yet the silence that came about five o'clock with its sudden cessation was in a manner quite as oppressive. The booming of the river had everything in its own way then: it filled the air with deep murmurs, more musical than the wind noises, but infinitely more monotonous. The wind held many notes, rising, falling, always beating out some sort of great elemental tune; whereas the river's song lay between three notes at most—dull pedal notes, that held a lugubrious quality

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foreign to the wind, and somehow seemed to me, in my then nervous state, to sound wonderfully well the music of doom.

It was extraordinary, too, how the withdrawal suddenly of bright sunlight took everything out of the landscape that made for cheerfulness; and since this particular landscape had already managed to convey the suggestion of something sinister, the change of course was all the more unwelcome and noticeable. For me, I know the darkening outlook became distinctly more alarming, and I found myself more than once calculating how soon after sunset the full moon would get up in the east, and whether the gathering clouds would greatly interfere with her lighting of the little island.

With this general hush of the wind—though it still indulged in occasional brief gusts—the river seemed to me to grow blacker, the willows to stand more densely together. The latter, too, kept up a sort of independent movement of their own, rustling among themselves when no wind stirred, and shaking oddly from the roots upward. When common objects in this way become charged with the suggestion of horror, they stimulate the imagination far more than things of usual appearance; and these bushes, crowding huddled about us, assumed for me in the darkness a bizarre *grotesquerie* of appearance that lent to them somehow the aspect of purposeful and living creatures. Their very ordinariness, I felt, masked what was malignant and hostile to us. The forces of the region drew nearer with the coming of night. They were focusing upon our island, and more particularly upon ourselves. For thus, somehow, in the terms of the imagination, did my really indescribable sensations in this extraordinary place present themselves.

I had slept a good deal in the early afternoon, and had thus recovered somewhat from the exhaustion of a disturbed night, but this only served apparently to render me more susceptible than before to the obsessing spell of the haunting. I fought against it, laughing at my feelings as absurd and childish, with very obvious physiological explanations, yet, in spite of every effort, they gained in strength upon me so that I dreaded the night as a child lost in a forest must dread the approach of darkness.

The canoe we had carefully covered with a waterproof sheet during the day, and the one remaining paddle had been securely tied by the Swede to the base of a tree, lest the wind should rob us of that too. From five o'clock onwards I busied myself with the stew-pot and preparations for dinner, it being my turn to cook that night. We had potatoes, onions, bits of bacon fat to add flavour, and a general thick residue from former stews at the bottom of the pot; with black bread broken up into it the result was most excellent, and it was followed by a stew of plums with sugar and a brew of strong tea with dried milk. A good pile of wood lay close at hand, and the absence of wind made my duties easy. My companion sat lazily watching me, dividing his attentions between cleaning his pipe and giving useless advice—an admitted privilege of the off-duty man. He had been very quiet all the afternoon, engaged in re-caulking the canoe, strengthening the tent ropes, and fishing for driftwood while I slept. No more talk about undesirable things had passed between us, and I think his only remarks had to do with the gradual destruction of the island, which he declared was now fully a third smaller than when we first landed.

The pot had just begun to bubble when I heard his voice calling to me from the bank, where he had wandered away without my noticing. I ran up.

"Come and listen," he said, "and see what you make of it." He held his hand cupwise to his ear, as so often before.

"*Now* do you hear anything?" he asked, watching me curiously.

WE STOOD there, listening attentively together. At first I heard only the deep note of the water and the hissings rising from its turbulent surface. The willows, for once, were motionless and silent. Then a sound began to reach my ears faintly, a peculiar sound—something like the humming of a distant gong. It seemed to come across to us in the darkness from the waste of swamps and willows opposite. It was repeated at regular intervals, but it was certainly neither the sound of a bell nor the hooting of a distant steamer. I can liken it to nothing so much as to the sound of an immense gong, suspended far up in the sky, repeating incessantly its muffled metallic note, soft and musical, as it was repeatedly struck. My heart quickened as I listened.

"I've heard it all day," said my companion. "While you slept this afternoon it came all round the island. I hunted it down, but could never get near enough to see—to localise it correctly. Sometimes it

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was overhead, and sometimes it seemed under the water. Once or twice, too, I could have sworn it was not outside at all, but *within myself*—you know—the way a sound in the fourth dimension is supposed to come."

I was too much puzzled to pay much attention to his words. I listened carefully, striving to associate it with any known familiar sound I could think of, but without success. It changed in the direction, too, coming nearer, and then sinking utterly away into remote distance. I cannot say that it was ominous in quality, because to me it seemed distinctly musical, yet I must admit it set going a distressing feeling that made me wish I had never heard it.

"The wind blowing in those sand-funnels," I said determined to find an explanation, "or the bushes rubbing together after the storm perhaps."

"It comes off the whole swamp," my friend answered. "It comes from everywhere at once." He ignored my explanations. "It comes from the willow bushes somehow—"

"But now the wind has dropped," I objected. "The willows can hardly make a noise by themselves, can they?"

His answer frightened me, first because I had dreaded it, and secondly, because I knew intuitively it was true.

"It is *because* the wind has dropped we now hear it. It was drowned before. It is the cry, I believe, of the—"

I dashed back to my fire, warned by a sound of bubbling that the stew was in danger, but determined at the same time to escape further conversation. I was resolute, if possible, to avoid the exchanging of views. I dreaded, too, that he would begin about the gods, or the elemental forces, or something else disquieting, and I wanted to keep myself well in hand for what might happen later. There was another night to be faced before we escaped from this distressing place, and there was no knowing yet what it might bring forth.

"Come and cut up bread for the pot," I called to him, vigorously stirring the appetising mixture. The stew-pot held sanity for us both, and the thought made me laugh.

He came over slowly and took the provision sack from the tree, fumbling in its mysterious depths, and then emptying the entire contents upon the ground-sheet at his feet.

"Hurry up!" I cried; "it's boiling."

The Swede burst out into a roar of laughter that startled me. It was forced laughter, not artificial exactly, but mirthless.

"There's nothing here!" he shouted, holding his sides.

"Bread, I mean."

"It's gone. There is no bread. They've taken it!"

I dropped the long spoon and ran up. Everything the sack had contained lay upon the ground-sheet, but there was no loaf.

The whole dead weight of my growing fear fell upon me and shook me. Then I burst out laughing too. It was the only thing to do: and the sound of my laughter also made me understand his. The strain of psychical pressure caused it—this explosion of unnatural laughter in both of us; it was an effort of repressed forces to seek relief; it was a temporary safety-valve. And with both of us it ceased quite suddenly.

"How criminally stupid of me!" I cried, still determined to be consistent and find an explanation. "I clean forgot to buy a loaf at Pressburg. That chattering woman put everything out of my head, and I must have left it lying on the counter or—"

"The oatmeal, too, is much less than it was this morning," the Swede interrupted.

Why in the world need he draw attention to it? I thought angrily.

"There's enough for to-morrow," I said, stirring vigorously, "and we can get lots at Komorn or Gran. In twenty-four hours we shall be miles from here."

"I hope so—to God," he muttered, putting the things back into the sack, "unless we're claimed first as victims for the sacrifice," he added with a foolish laugh. He dragged the sack into the tent, for safety's sake, I suppose, and I heard him mumbling on to himself, but so indistinctly that it seemed quite natural for me to ignore his words.

OUR meal was beyond question a gloomy one, and we ate it almost in silence, avoiding one another's eyes, and keeping the fire bright. Then we washed up and prepared for the night, and, once smoking, our minds unoccupied with any definite duties, the apprehension I had felt all day long become more and more acute. It was not then active fear, I think, but the very vagueness of its origin distressed me far more than if I had been able to ticket and face it squarely.

The curious sound I have likened to the

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note of a gong became now almost incessant, and filled the stillness of the night with a faint, continuous ringing rather than a series of distinct notes. At one time it was behind and at another time in front of us. Sometimes I fancied it came from the bushes on our left, and then again from the clumps on our right. More often it hovered directly overhead like the whirring of wings. It was really everywhere at once, behind, in front, at our sides and over our heads, completely surrounding us. The sound really defies description. But nothing within my knowledge is like that ceaseless muffled humming rising off the deserted world of swamps and willows.

We sat smoking in comparative silence, the strain growing every minute greater. The worst feature of the situation seemed to me that we did not know what to expect, and could therefore make no sort of preparation by way of defence. We could anticipate nothing. My explanations made in the sunshine, moreover, now came to haunt me with their foolish and wholly unsatisfactory nature, and it was more and more clear to us that some kind of plain talk with my companion was inevitable, whether I liked it or not. After all, we had to spend the night together, and to sleep in the same tent side by side. I saw that I could not get along much longer without the support of his mind, and for that, of course, plain talk was imperative. As long as possible, however, I postponed this little climax, and tried to ignore or laugh at the occasional sentences he flung into the emptiness.

Some of these sentences, moreover, were confoundedly disquieting to me, coming as they did to corroborate much that I felt myself: corroboration, too—which made it so much more convincing—from a totally different point of view. He composed such curious sentences, and hurled them at me in such an inconsequential sort of way, as though his main line of thought was secret to himself, and these fragments were bits he found it impossible to digest. He got rid of them by uttering them. Speech relieved him. It was like being sick.

"There are things about us, I'm sure, that make for disorder, disintegration, destruction, *our* destruction," he said once, while the fire blazed between us. "We've strayed out of a safe line somewhere."

And another time, when the gong sounds had come nearer, ringing much louder than before, and directly over our heads, he said as though talking to himself:

"I don't think a gramophone would show any record of that. The sound doesn't come to me by the ears at all. The vibrations reach me in another manner altogether, and seem to be within me, which is precisely how a fourth dimensional sound might be supposed to make itself heard."

I purposely made no reply to this, but I sat up a little closer to the fire and peered about me into the darkness. The clouds were massed all over the sky, and no trace of moonlight came through. Very still, too, everything was, so that the river and the frogs had things all their own way.

"It has that about it," he went on, "which is utterly out of common experience. It is *unknown*. Only one thing describes it really: it is a non-human sound; I mean a sound outside humanity."

Having rid himself of this indigestible morsel, he lay quiet for a time; but he had so admirably expressed my own feeling that it was a relief to have the thought out, and to have confined it by the limitation of words from dangerous wandering to and fro in the mind.

The solitude of that Danube camping-place, can I ever forget it? The feeling of being utterly alone on an empty planet! My thoughts ran incessantly upon cities and the haunts of men. I would have given my soul, as the saying is, for the "feel" of those Bavarian villages we had passed through by the score; for the normal, human commonplaces: peasants drinking beer, tables beneath the trees, hot sunshine, and a ruined castle on the rocks behind the red-roofed church. Even the tourists would have been welcome.

Yet what I felt of dread was no ordinary ghostly fear. It was infinitely greater, stranger, and seemed to arise from some dim ancestral sense of terror more profoundly disturbing than anything I had known or dreamed of. We had "strayed", as the Swede put it, into some region or some set of conditions where the risks were great, yet unintelligible to us; where the frontiers of some unknown world lay close about us. It was a spot held by the dwellers in some outer space, a sort of peep-hole whence they could spy upon the earth, themselves unseen, a point where the veil between had worn a little thin. As the final result of too long a sojourn here, we should be carried over the border and deprived of what we called "our lives", yet by mental, not physical, processes. In that sense, as he said, we should be the victims of our adventure—a sacrifice.

It took us in different fashion, each according to the measure of his sensitiveness

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and powers of resistance. I translated it vaguely into a personification of the mightily disturbed elements, investing them with the horror of a deliberate and malefic purpose, resentful of our audacious intrusion into their breeding-place; whereas my friend threw it into the unoriginal form at first of a trespass on some ancient shrine, some place where the old gods still held sway, where the emotional forces of former worshippers still clung, and the ancestral portion of him yielded to the old pagan spell.

At any rate, here was a place unpolluted by men, kept clean by the winds from coarsening human influences, a place where spiritual agencies were within reach and aggressive. Never, before or since, have I been so attacked by indescribable suggestions of a "beyond region", of another scheme of life, another revolution not parallel to the human. And in the end our minds would succumb under the weight of the awful spell, and we should be drawn across the frontier into *their* world.

SMALL things testified to the amazing influence of the place, and now in the silence round the fire they allowed themselves to be noted by the mind. The very atmosphere had proven itself a magnifying medium to distort every indication: the otter rolling in the current, the hurrying boatman making signs, the shifting willows, one and all had been robbed of its natural character, and revealed in something of its other aspect—as it existed across the border in that other region. And this changed aspect I felt was new not merely to me, but to the race. The whole experience whose verge we touched was unknown to humanity at all. It was a new order of experience, and in the true sense of the word *unearthly*.

"It's the deliberate, calculating purpose that reduces one's courage to zero," the Swede said suddenly, as if he had been actually following my thoughts. "Otherwise imagination might count for much. But the paddle, the canoe, the lessening food—"

"Haven't I explained all that once?" I interrupted viciously.

"You have," he answered dryly; "you have indeed."

He made other remarks too, as usual, about what he called the "plain determination to provide a victim"; but, having now arranged my thoughts better, I recognised that this was simply the cry of his frightened soul against the knowledge that he was being attacked in a vital part, and that he would be somehow taken or destroyed. The situation called for a courage and calmness of reasoning that neither of us could compass, and I have never before been so clearly conscious of two persons in me—the one that explained everything, and the other that laughed at such foolish explanations, yet was horribly afraid.

Meanwhile, in the pitchy night the fire died down and the wood pile grew small. Neither of us moved to replenish the stock, and the darkness consequently came up very close to our faces. A few feet beyond the circle of firelight it was inky black. Occasionally a stray puff of wind set the willows shivering about us, but apart from this not very welcome sound a deep and depressing silence reigned, broken only by the gurgling of the river and the humming in the air overhead.

We both missed, I think, the shouting company of the winds.

At length, at a moment when a stray puff prolonged itself as though the wind were about to rise again, I reached the point for me of saturation, the point where it was absolutely necessary to find relief in plain speech, or else to betray myself by some hysterical extravagance that must have been far worse in its effect upon both of us. I kicked the fire into a blaze, and turned to my companion abruptly. He looked up with a start.

"I can't disguise it any longer," I said; "I don't like this place, and the darkness, and the noises, and the awful feelings I get. There's something here that beats me utterly. I'm in a blue funk, and that's the plain truth. If the other shore was—different, I swear I'd be inclined to swim for it!"

The Swede's face turned very white beneath the deep tan of sun and wind. He stared straight at me and answered quietly, but his voice betrayed his huge excitement by its unnatural calmness. For the moment, at any rate, he was the strong man of the two. He was more phlegmatic, for one thing.

"It's not a physical condition we can escape from by running away," he replied, in the tone of a doctor diagnosing some grave disease; "we must sit tight and wait. There are forces close here that could kill a herd of elephants in a second as easily as you or I could squash a fly. Our only chance is to keep perfectly still. Our insignificance perhaps may save us."

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I put a dozen questions into my expression of face, but found no words. It was precisely like listening to an accurate description of a disease whose symptoms had puzzled me.

"I mean that so far, although aware of our disturbing presence, they have not *found* us—not 'located' us, as the Americans say," he went on. "They're blundering about like men hunting for a leak of gas. The paddle and canoe and provisions prove that. I think they *feel* us, but cannot actually see us. We must keep our minds quiet—it's our minds they feel. We must control our thoughts, or it's all up with us."

"Death, you mean?" I stammered, icy with the horror of his suggestion.

"Worse—by far," he said. "Death, according to one's belief, means either annihilation or release from the limitations of the senses, but it involves no change of character. *You* don't suddenly alter just because the body's gone. But this means a radical alteration, a complete change, a horrible loss of oneself by substitution—far worse than death, and not even annihilation. We happen to have camped in a spot where their region touches ours, where the veil between has worn thin"—horrors! he was using my very own phrase, my actual words—"so that they are aware now of our being here in their neighborhood."

"But *who* are aware?" I asked.

I forgot the shaking of the willows in the windless calm, the humming overhead, everything except that I was waiting for an answer that I dreaded more than I can possibly explain.

He lowered his voice at once to reply, leaning forward a little over the fire, an indefinable change in his face that made me avoid his eyes and look down upon the ground.

"All my life," he said, "I have been strangely, vividly conscious of another region—not far removed from our own world in one sense, yet wholly different in kind—where great things go on unceasingly, where immense and terrible personalities hurry by, intent on vast purposes compared to which earthly affairs, the rise and fall of nations, the destinies of empires, the fate of armies and continents, are all as dust in the balance; vast purposes, I mean, that deal directly with the soul, and not indirectly with mere expressions of the soul—"

"I suggest just now—" I began, seeking to stop him, feeling as though I were face to face with a madman. But he instantly overbore me with his torrent that *had* to come.

"You think," he said, "it is the spirits of the elements, and I thought perhaps it was the old gods. But I tell you now it is—*neither*. These would be comprehensible entities, for they have relations with men, depending upon them for worship or sacrifice, whereas these beings who are now about us have absolutely nothing to do with mankind, and it is mere chance that their space happens just at this spot to touch our own."

The mere conception, which his words somehow made so convincing, as I listened to them there in the dark stillness of that lonely island, set me shaking a little all over. I found it impossible to control my movements.

"And what do you propose?" I began again.

"A sacrifice, a victim, might save us by distracting them until we could get away," he went on, "just as the wolves stop to devour the dogs and give the sleigh another start. But—I see no chance of any other victim now."

I stared blankly at him. The gleam in his eyes was dreadful. Presently he continued.

"It's the willows, of course. The willows *mask* the others, but the others are feeling about us. If we let our minds betray our fear, we're lost, lost utterly." He looked at me with an expression so calm, so determined, so sincere, that I no longer had any doubts as to his sanity. He was as sane as any man ever was. "If we can hold out through the night," he added, "we may get off in the daylight unnoticed, or rather, *undiscovered*."

"But you really think a sacrifice would—"

That gong-like humming came down very close over our heads as I spoke, but it was my friend's scared face that really stopped my mouth.

"Hush!" he whispered, holding up his hand. "Do not mention them more than you can help. Do not refer to them *by name*. To name is to reveal: it is the inevitable clue, and our only hope lies in ignoring them, in order that they may ignore us."

"Even in thought?" He was extraordinarily agitated.

"Especially in thought. Our thoughts make spirals in their world. We must keep them *out of our minds* at all costs if possible."

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I RAKED the fire together to prevent the darkness having everything its own way. I never longed for the sun as I longed for it then in the awful blackness of that summer night.

"Were you awake all last night?" he went on suddenly.

"I slept badly a little after dawn," I replied evasively, trying to follow his instructions, which I knew instinctively were true, "but the wind, of course—"

"I know. But the wind won't account for all the noises."

"Then you heard it too?"

"The multiplying countless little footsteps I heard," he said, adding, after a moment's hesitation, "and that other sound—"

"You mean above the tent, and the pressing down upon us of something tremendous, gigantic?"

He nodded significantly.

"It was like the beginning of a sort of inner suffocation?" I said.

"Partly, yes. It seemed to me that the weight of the atmosphere had been altered—had increased enormously, so that we should be crushed."

"And *that*," I went on, determined to have it all out, pointing upwards where the gong-like note hummed ceaselessly, rising and falling like wind. "What do you make of that?"

"It's *their* sound," he whispered gravely. "It's the sound of their world, the humming in their region. The division here is so thin that it leaks through somehow. But, if you listen carefully, you'll find it's not above so much as around us. It's in the willows. It's the willows themselves humming, because here the willows have been made symbols of the forces that are against us."

I could not follow exactly what he meant by this, yet the thought and idea in my mind were beyond question the thought and idea in his. I realised, what he realised only with less power of analysis than his. It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him at last about my hallucination of the ascending figures and the moving bushes, when he suddenly thrust his face again close into mine across the firelight and began to speak in a very earnest whisper. He amazed me by his calmness and pluck, his apparent control of the situation. This man I had for years deemed unimaginative, stolid!

"Now listen," he said. "The only thing for us to do is to go on as though nothing had happened, follow our usual habits, go to bed, and so forth; pretend we feel nothing and notice nothing. It is a question wholly of the mind, and the less we think about them the better our chance of escape. Above all, don't *think*, for what you think happens!"

"All right," I managed to reply, simply breathless with his words and the strangeness of it all; "all right, I'll try, but tell me one thing more first. Tell me what you make of those hollows in the ground all about us, those sand-funnels."

"No!" he cried, forgetting to whisper in his excitement. "I dare not, simply dare not, put the thought into words. If you have not guessed I am glad. Don't try to. *They* have put it into my mind; try your hardest to prevent their putting it into yours."

He sank his voice again to a whisper before he finished, and I did not press him to explain. There was already just about as much horror in me as I could hold. The conversation came to an end, and we smoked our pipes busily in silence.

Then something happened, something unimportant apparently, as the way is when the nerves are in a very great state of tension, and this small thing for a brief space gave me an entirely different point of view. I chanced to look down at my sand-shoe—the sort we used for the canoe—and something to do with the hole at the toe suddenly recalled to me the London shop where I had bought them, the difficulty the man had in fitting me, and other details of the uninteresting but practical operation. At once, in its train, followed a wholesome view of the modern sceptical world I was accustomed to move in at home. I thought of roast beef and ale, motor-cars, policemen, brass bands, and a dozen other things that proclaimed the soul of ordinariness or utility. The effect was immediate and astonishing even to myself. Psychologically, I suppose, it was simply a sudden and violent reaction after the strain of living in an atmosphere of things that to the normal consciousness must seem impossible and incredible. But, whatever the cause, it momentarily lifted the spell from my heart, and left me for the short space of a minute feeling free and utterly unafraid. I looked up at my friend opposite.

"You damned old pagan!" I cried, laughing aloud in his face. "You imaginative idiot! You superstitious idolator! You—"

I stopped in the middle, seized anew by the old horror. I tried to smother the sound of my voice as something sacrilegious. The

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Swede, of course, heard it too—the strange cry overhead in the darkness—and that sudden drop in the air as though something had come nearer.

He had turned ashen white under the tan. He stood bolt upright in front of the fire, stiff as a rod, staring at me.

"After that," he said in a sort of helpless, frantic way, "we must go! We can't stay now; we must strike camp this very instant and go on—down the river."

He was talking, I saw, quite wildly, his words dictated by abject terror—the terror he had resisted so long, but which had caught him at last.

"In the dark?" I exclaimed, shaking with fear after my hysterical outburst, but still realising our position better than he did. "Sheer madness! The river's in flood, and we've only got a single paddle. Besides, we only go deeper into their country! There's nothing ahead for fifty miles but willows, willows, willows!"

He sat down again in a state of semi-collapse. The positions, by one of those kaleidoscopic changes nature loves, were suddenly reversed, and the control of our forces passed over into my hands. His mind at last had reached the point where it was beginning to weaken.

"What on earth possessed you to do such a thing?" he whispered with the awe of genuine terror in his voice and face.

I crossed round to his side of the fire. I took both his hands in mine, kneeling down beside him and looking straight into his frightened eyes.

"We'll make one more blaze," I said firmly, "and then turn in for the night. At sunrise we'll be off full speed for Komorn. Now, pull yourself together a bit, and remember your own advice about *not thinking fear!*"

He said no more, and I saw that he would agree and obey. In some measure, too, it was a sort of relief to get up and make an excursion into the darkness for more wood. We kept close together, almost touching, groping among the bushes and along the bank. The humming overhead never ceased, but seemed to me to grow louder as we increased our distance from the fire. It was shivery work!

WE WERE grubbing away in the middle of a *thickish* clump of willows where some driftwood from a former flood had caught high among the branches, when my body was seized in a grip that made me half drop upon the sand. It was the Swede. He had fallen against me, and was clutching me for support. I heard his breath coming and going in short gasps.

"Look! By my soul!" he whispered, and for the first time in my experience I knew what it was to hear tears of terror in a human voice. He was pointing to the fire, some fifty feet away. I followed the direction of his finger, and I swear my heart missed a beat.

There, in front of the dim glow, *something was moving.*

I saw it through a veil that hung before my eyes like the gauze drop-curtain used at the back of a theatre—hazily a little. It was neither a human figure nor an animal. To me it gave the strange impression of being as large as several animals grouped together, like horses, two or three, moving slowly. The Swede, too, got a similar result, though expressing it differently, for he thought it was shaped and sized like a clump of willow bushes, rounded at the top, and moving all over upon its surface—"coiling upon itself like smoke," he said afterwards.

"I watched it settle downwards through the bushes," he sobbed at me. "Look, by God! It's coming this way! Oh, oh!"—he gave a kind of whistling cry. *"They've found us."*

I gave one terrified glance, which just enabled me to see that the shadowy form was swinging towards us through the bushes, and then I collapsed backwards with a crash into the branches. These failed, of course, to support my weight, so that with the Swede on the top of me we fell in a struggling heap upon the sand. I really hardly knew what was happening. I was conscious only of a sort of enveloping sensation of icy fear that plucked the nerves out of their fleshly covering, twisted them this way and that, and replaced them quivering. My eyes were tightly shut; something in my throat choked me; a feeling that my consciousness was expanding, extending out into space, swiftly gave way to another feeling that I was losing it altogether, and about to die.

An acute spasm of pain passed through me, and I was aware that the Swede had hold of me in such a way that he hurt me abominably. It was the way he caught at me in falling.

But it was the pain, he declared afterwards, that saved me: it caused me to *forget them* and think of something else at the very instant when they were about to find me. It concealed my mind from them at the moment of discovery, yet just in time to evade their terrible seizing of

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me. He himself, he says, actually swooned at the same moment, and that was what saved him.

I only know that at a later date, how long or short is impossible to say, I found myself scrambling up out of the slippery network of willow branches, and saw my companion standing in front of me holding out a hand to assist me. I stared at him in a dazed way, rubbing the arm he had twisted for me. Nothing came to me to say, somehow.

"I lost consciousness for a moment or two," I heard him say. "That's what saved me. It made me stop thinking about them."

"You nearly broke my arm in two," I said, uttering my only connected thought at the moment. A numbness came over me.

"That's what saved *you!*" he replied. "Between us, we've managed to set them off on a false tack somewhere. The humming has ceased. It's gone—for the moment at any rate!"

A wave of hysterical laughter seized me again, and this time spread to my friend too—great healing gusts of shaking laughter that brought a tremendous sense of relief in their train. We made our way back to the fire and put the wood on so that it blazed at once. Then we saw that the tent had fallen over and lay in a tangled heap upon the ground.

We picked it up, and during the process tripped more than once and caught our feet in sand.

"It's those sand-funnels," exclaimed the Swede, when the tent was up again and the firelight lit up the ground for several yards about us. "And look at the size of them!"

All round the tent and about the fireplace where we had seen the moving shadows there were deep funnel-shaped hollows in the sand, exactly similar to the ones we had already found over the island, only far bigger and deeper, beautifully formed, and wide enough in some instances to admit the whole of my foot and leg.

Neither of us said a word. We both knew that sleep was the safest thing we could do, and to bed we went accordingly without further delay, having first thrown sand on the fire and taken the provision sack and the paddle inside the tent with us. The canoe, too, we propped in such a way at the end of the tent that our feet touched it, and the least motion would disturb and wake us.

In case of emergency, too, we again went to bed in our clothes, ready for a sudden start.

IT WAS my firm intention to lie awake all night and watch, but the exhaustion of nerves and body decreed otherwise, and sleep after a while came over me with a welcome blanket of oblivion. The fact that my companion also slept quickened its approach. At first he fidgeted and constantly sat up, asking me if I "heard this" or "heard that". He tossed about on his cork mattress, and said the tent was moving and the river had risen over the point of the island; but each time I went out to look I returned with the report that all was well, and finally he grew calmer and lay still. Then at length his breathing became regular and I heard unmistakable sounds of snoring—the first and only time in my life when snoring has been a welcome and calming influence.

This, I remember, was the last thought in my mind before dozing off.

A difficulty in breathing woke me, and I found the blanket over my face. But something else besides the blanket was pressing upon me, and my first thought was that my companion had rolled off his mattress on to my own in his sleep. I called to him and sat up, and at the same moment it came to me that the tent was *surrounded*. That sound of multitudinous soft pattering was again audible outside, filling the night with horror.

I called again to him, louder than before. He did not answer, but I missed the sound of his snoring, and also noticed that the flap of the tent door was down. This was the unpardonable sin. I crawled out in the darkness to hook it back securely, and it was then for the first time I realised positively that the Swede was not there. He had gone.

I dashed out in a mad run, seized by a dreadful agitation, and the moment I was out I plunged into a sort of torrent of humming that surrounded me completely and came out of every quarter of the heavens at once. It was that same familiar humming—gone mad! A swarm of great invisible bees might have been about me in the air. The sound seemed to thicken the very atmosphere, and I felt that my lungs worked with difficulty.

But my friend was in danger, and I could not hesitate.

The dawn was just about to break, and a faint whitish light spread upwards over the clouds from a thin strip of clear horizon. No wind stirred. I could just make

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out the bushes and river beyond, and the pale sandy patches. In my excitement I ran frantically to and fro about the island, calling him by name, shouting at the top of my voice the first words that came into my head. But the willows smothered my voice, and the humming muffled it, so that the sound only travelled a few feet round me. I plunged among the bushes, tripping headlong, tumbling over roots, and scraping my face as I tore this way and that among the preventing branches.

Then, quite unexpectedly, I came out upon the island's point and saw a dark figure outlined between the water and the sky. It was the Swede. And already he had one foot in the river! A moment more and he would have taken the plunge.

I threw myself upon him, flinging my arms about his waist and dragging him shorewards with all my strength. Of course he struggled furiously, making a noise all the time just like that cursed humming, and using the most outlandish phrases in his anger about "going *inside* to Them", and "taking the way of the water and the wind", and God only knows what more besides, that I tried in vain to recall afterwards, but which turned me sick with horror and amazement as I listened. But in the end I managed to get him into the comparative safety of the tent, and flung him breathless and cursing upon the mattress where I held him until the fit had passed.

I think the suddenness with which it all went and he grew calm, coinciding as it did with the equally abrupt cessation of the humming and pattering outside—I think this was almost the strangest part of the whole business perhaps. For he just opened his eyes and turned his tired face up to me so that the dawn threw a pale light upon it through the doorway, and said, for all the world just like a frightened child:

"My life, old man—it's my life I owe you. But it's all over now anyhow. They've found a victim in our place!"

Then he dropped back upon his blankets and went to sleep literally under my eyes. He simply collapsed, and began to snore again as healthily as though nothing had happened and he had never tried to offer his own life as a sacrifice by drowning. And when the sunlight woke him three hours later—hours of ceaseless vigil for me—it became so clear to me that he remembered absolutely nothing of what he had attempted to do, that I deemed it wise to hold my peace and ask no dangerous questions.

HE WOKE naturally and easily, as I have said, when the sun was already high in a windless hot sky, and he at once got up and set about the preparation of the fire for breakfast. I followed him anxiously at bathing, but he did not attempt to plunge in, merely dipping his head and making some remark about the extra coldness of the water.

"River's falling at last," he said, "and I'm glad of it."

"The humming has stopped too," I said.

I started writing the novel when our ship was off Cuba and finished it just outside San Diego. So at least the pages are salty.

That's an excerpt from R. W. Daly's letter which accompanied the manuscript of the exciting new two-part story, "CLEARED FOR ACTION," beginning in our March issue—the tale of Farmery Gosselyn, R.N., who became a captain in those stirring days when John Bull and Boney were at each other's throats and every French ship from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean was fair game for any craft that flew the White Ensign.

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He looked up at me quietly with his normal expression. Evidently he remembered everything except his own attempt at suicide.

"Everything has stopped," he said, "because—"

He hesitated. But I knew some reference to that remark he had made just before he fainted was in his mind, and I was determined to know it.

"Because 'They've found another victim'?" I said, forcing a little laugh.

"Exactly," he answered, "exactly! I feel as positive of it as though—as though—I feel quite safe again, I mean," he finished.

He began to look curiously about him. The sunlight lay in hot patches on the sand. There was no wind. The willows were motionless. He slowly rose to feet.

"Come," he said; "I think if we look, we shall find it."

He started off on a run, and I followed him. He kept to the banks, poking with a stick among the sandy bays and caves and little back-waters, myself always close on his heels. "Ah!" he exclaimed presently.

The tone of his voice somehow brought back to me a vivid sense of the horror of the last twenty-four hours, and I hurried up to join him. He was pointing with his stick at a large black object that lay half in the water and half on the sand. It appeared to be caught by some twisted willow roots so that the river could not sweep it away. A few hours before the spot must have been under water.

"See," he said quietly, "the victim that made our escape possible!"

And when I peered across his shoulder I saw that his stick rested on the body of a man. He turned it over. It was the corpse of a peasant, and the face was hidden in the sand. Clearly the man had been drowned, but a few hours before, and his body must have been swept down upon our island somewhere about the hour of the dawn—*at the very time the fit had passed.*

"We must give it a decent burial, you know."

"I suppose so," I replied. I shuddered a little in spite of myself, for there was something about the appearance of that poor drowned man that turned me cold.

The Swede glanced up sharply at me, an undecipherable expression on his face, and began clambering down the bank. I followed him more leisurely. The current, I noticed, had torn away much of the clothing from the body, so that the neck and part of the chest lay bare.

Half-way down the bank my companion suddenly stopped and held up his hand in warning; but either my foot slipped, or I had gained too much momentum to bring myself quickly to a halt, for I bumped into him and sent him forward with a sort of leap to save himself. We tumbled together on to the hard sand so that our feet splashed into the water. And, before anything could be done, we had collided a little heavily against the corpse.

The Swede uttered a sharp cry. And I sprang back at the same time as if I had been shot.

At the moment we touched the body there rose from its surface the loud sound of humming—the sound of several hummings—which passed with a vast commotion as of winged things in the air about us and disappeared upwards into the sky, growing fainter and fainter till they finally ceased in the distance. It was exactly as though we had disturbed some living yet invisible creatures at work.

My companion clutched me, and I think I clutched him, but before either of us had time properly to recover from the unexpected shock, we saw that a movement of the current was turning the corpse round so that it became released from the grip of the willow roots. A moment later it had turned completely over, the dead face uppermost, staring at the sky. It lay on the edge of the main stream. In another moment it would be swept away.

The Swede started to save it, shouting again something I did not catch about a "proper burial"—and then abruptly dropped upon his knees on the sand and covered his eyes with his hands. I was beside him in an instant.

I saw what he had seen.

For just as the body swung round to the current the face and the exposed chest turned full towards us, and showed plainly how the skin and flesh were indented with small hollows, beautifully formed, and exactly similar in shape and kind to the sand-funnels that we had found all over the island.

"Their mark!" I heard my companion mutter under his breath. "Their awful mark!"

And when I turned my eyes again from his ghastly face to the river, the current had done its work, and the body had been swept away into mid-stream and was already beyond our reach and almost out of sight, turning over and over on the waves like an otter.

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(Continued from page 89)

AN OFFER

I think F.F.M. is the best fantasy mag on the market and am trying to complete my collection. I have about 75 science fiction mags and Burroughs' Mars books that I would like to trade for F.F.M.'s, Weird Tales, etc. I will send a list to anyone interested.

MRS. EARL BECKER.

11 North German St.,
Mayville, Wisc.

SUGGESTIONS

I hear that F.F.M. is going to appear more often. That is wonderful and with that as a start, may we expect to see Finlay and Paul in '46? Also a larger format, a page or two of poems in each issue and trimmed edges, perhaps.

For those fans who may be interested, I have one copy each of Lovecraft's "Beyond the Wall of Sleep" and C. A. Smith's "Out of Space and Time," both as new, with dust wrappers, a first edition of "Synthetic Men of Mars," new with the wrapper and Stapledon's "Last and First Men" new with wrapper.

Considering stories for future issues, may I nominate "Out of the Silence" by Erle Cox and Chambers's "Slayer of Souls?"

These, in my estimation, are among the finest in fantasy.

Best wishes to the finest magazine on the market.

ROBERT STOKER.

909 W. 10th St.,
Marion, Ind.

HAS MISSED ISSUES

As I'm told the restrictions will be lifted shortly on all U.S. publications out this way, I'm getting in early to subscribe to *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. I've missed the following issues. "The Ark of Fire," "The Iron Star," "Three Go Back," "The Man Who was Thursday," "The Greatest Adventure," "The Machine Stops."

"The Boats of the Glen Carrig," was excellent and has some of the weirdest ideas in a long time. The illustrations are not up to the standard of Lawrence's others, "The Lost Continent" for instance. "Even a Worm," was a good filler-up.

K. STIRLING MACOBOY.

"Shelcote,"
25 Shell Cove Rd.,
Neutral Bay,
Sydney, N.S.W.,
Australia

"ANCIENT ALLAN" EXCELLENT

Your December issue wasn't, in my opinion, of the high quality of the previous issues. The Haggard tale was good but the Dunsany short was poor. The cover was only fair but inside illustrations of "The Ancient Allan" were excellent.

But even with these grumps, your magazine is the finest made. May I suggest a few stories I'd like to see in F.F.M.—"The Land of Unreason," L. Sprague DeCamp, Herbert Gorman's "The Place Called Dagon"—"At the Earth's Core," and "Pellucidar," by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

I've been reading fantasy for over seven years now and my favorite authors are H. P. Lovecraft, A. Merritt, H. G Wells, and Clark Ashton Smith.

Yours—and for a long life to F.F.M.,

ROY HALE.

ADMIRER OF ARNOLD'S "PHRA"

I enjoyed the novel, "Phra the Phoenician," through and through. The story began as if we were to have a good pirate story, but I am thankful it was not, for I do not like pirate or knight stories.

It was very well written. Mr. Arnold gets a lot told in one sentence. Especially, I like the way he described the battle of Crécy, between the knights of the English and French. Egad! Here was blood-and-thunderous action, all well told.

The cover for "Phra" was excellent. The figures on the cover seem real. The best inside illustration was on page 93.

I would like to send a plea for "Face in the Abyss," by Merritt. Has any fan got this book?

JAMES AYERS.

609 1st St.,
Attalla, Ala.

INDIVIDUALIST

If you'll take those limpid orbs off the waste paper basket a moment, I should like to add my voice to the squawks, howls and cauterwauling that beset you.

I was really pleased to find "Phra The Phoenician" so readable. It was a trifle wordy and a bit history-bookish, but beautifully woven together. I'll bet you a used doughnut that Arnold could quote Shakespeare in reams!

The other story "Heaven Only Knows" was either a filler or an afterthought. "Heaven Only Knows" how it came to be written. The idea was cute, but I actually blushed for Hitler, throwing around his correspondence course German. And if Paradise is as casual as Archibald paints it, then open the gates for a convert, Lucifer, ol' top!

But I *did* enjoy the mag. as usual. And here's one fan, Ed., who doesn't try to hide the covers from the gentry. If people will be allergic to red and yellow, that's their tough luck. Me, I'm an individualist.

RUBY MCDONALD.

14038 Lewis Rd.,
Clio, Mich.

"ANCIENT ALLAN" SCARCE

Received the December issue of F.F.M., as the first copy in my subscription. The Lawrence

(Continued on page 125)

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RODERICK'S STORY

By E. F. Benson

Only once in a hundred lifetimes is anyone privileged to see beyond the borderland of life—as was this strangely fear-free man. . . .

MY POWERS of persuasion at first seemed quite ineffectual; I could not induce my friend Roderick Cardew to strike his melancholy tent in Chelsea, and (leaving it struck) steal away like the Arabs and spend this month of spring with me at my newly acquired house at Tilling to observe the spell of April's wand making magic in the country. I seemed to have brought out all the arguments of which I was master; he had been very ill, and his doctor recommended a clearer air with as mild a climate as he could conveniently attain; he loved the great stretches of drained marsh-land which lay spread like a pool of verdure round the little town; he had not seen my new home, which made a breach in the function of hospitality, and he really could not be expected to object to his host, who, after all, was one of his oldest friends. Besides (to leave no stone unturned) as he regained his strength he could begin to play golf again, and it entailed, as he well remembered, a very mild exertion for him to keep me in my proper position in such a pursuit.

At last there was some sign of yielding.

"Yes. I should like to see the marsh and the big sky once more," he said.

A rather sinister interpretation of his words "once more," made a sudden flashed signal of alarm in my mind. It was utterly fanciful, no doubt, but that had better be extinguished first.

"Once more?" I asked. "What does that mean?"

"I always say 'once more,'" he said. "It's greedy to ask for too much."

The very fact that he fenced so ingeniously deepened my suspicion.

"That won't do," I said. "Tell me, Roddie."

He was silent a moment.

"I didn't intend to," he said, "for there can be no use in it. But if you insist, as apparently you mean to do, I may as well give in. It's what you think; 'once more' will very likely be the most. But you mustn't fuss about it; I'm not going to. No proper person fusses about death; that's a train which we are all sure to catch. It always waits for you."

I have noticed that when one learns tidings of that sort, one feels, almost immediately, that one had known them a long time. I felt so now.

"Go on," I said.

"Well, that's about all there is. I've had sentence of death passed upon me, and it will probably be carried out, I'm delighted to say, in the French fashion. In France, you know, they don't tell you when you are to be executed till a few minutes before. It is likely that I shall have even less than that, so my doctor informs me. A second or two will be all I shall get. Congratulate me, please."

I thought it over for a moment.

"Yes, heartily," I said. "I want to know a little more though."

"Well, my heart's all wrong, quite unmendably so. Heart-disease! Doesn't it sound romantic? In mid-Victorian romance, heroes and heroines alone die of heart-disease. But that's by the way. The fact is that I may die at any time without a moment's warning. I shall give a couple of gasps, so he told me when I insisted on knowing details, and that'll be all. Now, perhaps, you understand why I was unwilling to come and stay with you. I don't want to die in your house; I think it's dreadfully bad manners to die in other people's houses. I long to see Tilling again, but I think I shall go to an hotel. Hotels are fair game, for the management overcharges those who live there to compensate themselves for those who die there. But it would be rude of me to die in your house; it might entail a lot of bother for you, and I couldn't apologize—"

"But I don't mind your dying in my house. At least you see what I mean—"

From "Visible and Invisible," copyright 1923, 1924 by the George H. Doran Company.

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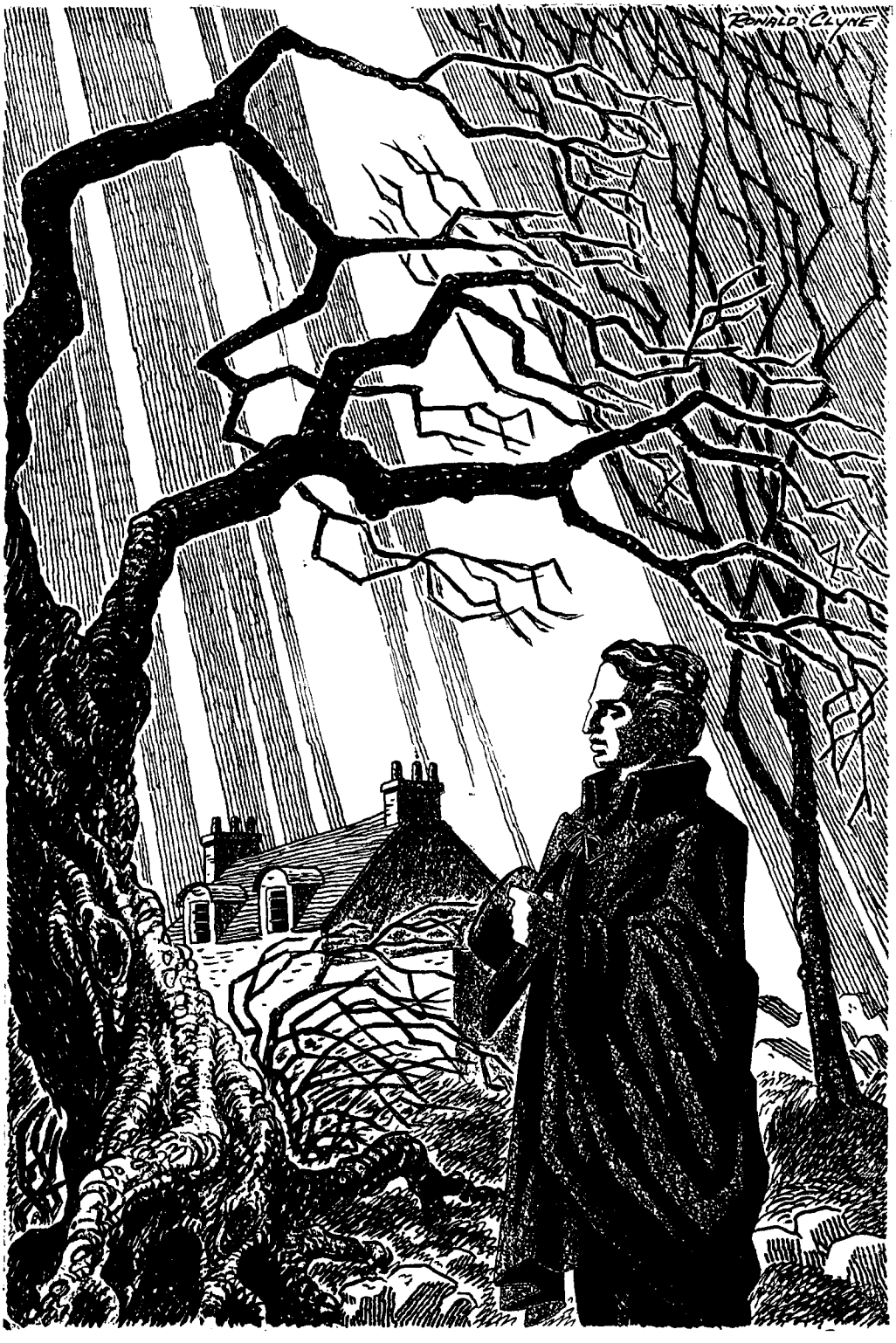

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He laughed.

"I do, indeed," he said. "And you couldn't give a warmer assurance of friendship. But I couldn't come and stay with you in my present plight without telling you what it was, and yet I didn't mean to tell you. But there we are now. Think again; reconsider your decision."

"I won't," I said. "Come and die in my house by all means, if you've got to. I would much sooner you lived there: your dying will in any case annoy me immensely. But it would annoy me more to know that you had done it in some beastly hotel among plush and looking-glasses. You shall have any bedroom you like. And I want you dreadfully to see my house, which is adorable. . . . Oh, Roddie, what a bore it all is!"

It was impossible to speak or to think differently. I knew well how trivial a matter death was to my friend, and I was not sure that at heart I did not agree with him. We were quite at one, too, in that we had so often gossiped about death with cheerful conjecture and interested surmise based on the steady assurance that something of new and delightful import was to follow, since neither of us happened to be of that melancholy cast of mind that can envisage annihilation. I had promised, in case I was the first to embark on the great adventure, to do my best to "get through," and give him some irrefutable proof of the continuance of my existence, just by way of endorsement of our belief, and he had given a similar pledge, for it appeared to us both that, whatever the conditions of the future might turn out to be, it would be impossible when lately translated there, not to be still greatly concerned with what the present world still held for us in ties of love and affection. I laughed now to remember how he had once imagined himself begging to be excused for a few minutes, directly after death, and saying to St. Peter: "May I keep your Holiness waiting for a minute before you finally lock me into Heaven or Hell with those beautiful keys? I won't be a minute, but I do want so much to be a ghost, and appear to a friend of mine who is on the look-out for such a visit. If I find I can't make myself visible I will come back at once. . . . Oh, *thank* you, your Holiness."

SO WE agreed that I should run the risk of his dying in my house, and promised not to make any reproaches posthumously (as far as he was concerned) in case he did so. He on his side promised not to die if he could possibly help it, and next week or so he would come down to me in the heart of the country that he loved, and see April at work.

"And I haven't told you anything about my house yet," I said. "It's right at the top of the hill, square and Georgian and red-bricked. A panelled hall, dining-room and panelled sitting-room downstairs, and more panelled rooms upstairs. And there's a garden with a lawn, and a high brick wall round it, and there is a big garden-room, full of books, with a bow-window looking down the cobbled street. Which bedroom will you have? Do you like looking on to the garden or on to the street? You may even have my room if you like."

He looked at me a moment with eager attention. "I'll have the square panelled bedroom that looks out on to the garden, please," he said. "It's the second door on the right when you stand at the top of the stairs."

"But how do you know about that?" I asked.

"Because I've been in the house before, once only, three years ago," he said. "Margaret Alton took it furnished for a couple of years or so. She died there, and I was with her. And if I had known that this was your house, I should never have dreamed of hesitating whether I should accept your invitation. I should have thrown my good manners about not dying in other people's houses to the winds. But the moment you began to describe the garden and garden-room I knew what house it was. I have always longed to go there again. When may I come, please? Next week is too far ahead. You're off there this afternoon, aren't you?"

I rose: the clock warned me that it was time for me to go to the station.

"Yes. Come this afternoon," I suggested. "Come with me."

"I wish I could, but I take that to mean that it will suit you if I come to-morrow. For I certainly will. Good Lord! To think of your having got just that house! It ought to be a wonderfully happy one, for I saw—but I'll tell you about that perhaps when I'm there. But don't ask me to: I'll tell you if and when I can, as the lawyers say. Are you really off?"

I was really off, for I had no time to spare, but before I got to the door he spoke again.

"Of course, the room I have chosen was *the* room," he said, and now there was no

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need for me to ask what he meant by *the* room.

I knew no more than the barest and most public outline of that affair, distant now by the space of many years, but, so I conceived, ever green in Roderick's heart, and, as my train threaded its way through the gleams of this translucent spring evening, I retraced this outline as far as I knew it. It was the one thing of which Roderick never spoke (even now he was not sure that he could manage to tell me the end of it), and I had to rummage in my memory for the reconstruction of the half-obliterated lines.

Margaret—her maiden name would not be conjured back into memory—had been an extremely beautiful girl when Roderick first met her, and, not without encouragement, he had fallen head over ears in love with her. All seemed to be going well with his wooing, he had the air of a happy lover, when there appeared on the scene that handsome and outrageous fellow, Richard Alton. He was the heir to his uncle's barony and his really vast estates, and the girl, when he proceeded to lay siege, very soon capitulated. She may have fallen in love with him, for he was an attractive scamp, but the verdict at the time was that it was her ambition, not her heart, that she indulged. In any case, there was the end of Roderick's wooing, and before the year was out she had married the other.

I remembered seeing her once or twice in London about this time, splendid and brilliant, of a beauty that dazzled, with the world very much at her feet. She bore him two sons; she succeeded to a great position; and then with the granting of her heart's desire, the leanness withal followed. Her husband's escapades were now numerous and notorious; he treated her with a subtle cruelty that just kept on the right side of the law, and, finally, seeking his freedom, he deserted her. Whether it was pride that kept her from divorcing him, or whether she still loved him (if she had ever done so) and was ready to take him back, or whether it was out of revenge that she refused to have done with him legally, was an affair of which I knew nothing. Calamity followed on calamity; first one and then the other of her sons was killed in the European War, and I remembered having heard that she was the victim of some malignant and disfiguring disease, which caused her to lead a hermit life, seeing nobody. It was now three years or so since she had died.

SUCH, with the addition that she had died in my house, and that Roderick had been with her, was the sum of my meagre knowledge, which might or might not, so he had intimated, be supplemented by him. He arrived next day, having motored down from London for the avoidance of fatigue, and certainly as we sat after dinner that night in the garden-room, he had avoided it very carefully, for never had I seen him more animated.

"Oh, I have been so right to come here," he said, "for I feel steeped in tranquillity and content. There's such a tremendous sense of Margaret's presence here, and I never knew how much I wanted it. Perhaps that is purely subjective, but does that matter so long as I feel it? How a scene soaks into the place where it has been enacted; my room, which you know was her room, is alive with her. I want nothing better than to be here, prowling and purring over the memory of the last time, which was the only one, that I was here. Yes, just that; and I know how odd you must think it. But it's true, it was here that I saw her die, and instead of shunning the place, I bathe myself in it. For it was one of the happiest hours of my life."

"Because—" I began.

"No; not because it gave her release, if that's in your mind," he said. "It's because I saw—"

He broke off, and remembering his stipulation that I should ask him nothing, but that he would tell me "if and when" he could, I put no question to him. His eyes were dancing with the sparkle of the fire burning on the hearth, for though April was here, the evenings were still chilly, and it was not the fire that gave them their light, but a joyousness that was as bright as glee, and as deep as happiness.

"No, I'm not going on with that now," he said, "though I expect I shall before my days are out. At present I shall leave you wondering why a place that should hold such mournful memories for me, is such a well-spring. And as I am not for telling you about me, let me enquire about you. Bring yourself up to date; what have you been doing, and much more important, what have you been thinking about?"

"My doings have chiefly been confined to settling into this house," I said. "I've been pulling and pushing furniture into places where it wouldn't go, and cursing it."

He looked round the room.

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"It doesn't seem to bear you any grudge," he said. "It looks contented. And what else?"

"In the intervals, when I couldn't push and curse any more," I said, "I've been writing a few spook stories. All about the borderland, which I love as much as you do."

He laughed outright.

"Do you, indeed?" he said. "Then it's no use my saying that it is quite impossible. But I should like to know your views on the borderland."

I pointed to a sheaf of typewritten stuff that littered my table.

"Them's my sentiments," I said, "and quite at your service."

"Good; then I'll take them to bed with me when I go, if you'll allow me. I've always thought that you had a pretty notion of the creepy, but the mistake that you make is to imagine that creepiness is characteristic of the borderland. No doubt there are creepy things there, but so there are everywhere, and a thunder-storm is far more terrifying than an apparition. And when you get really close to the borderland, you see how enchanting it is, and how vastly more enchanting the other side must be. I got right on to the borderland once, here in this house, as I shall probably tell you, and I never saw so happy and kindly a place. And without doubt I shall soon be careering across it in my own person. That'll be, as we've often determined, wildly interesting, and it will have the solemnity of a first night at a new play about it. There'll be the curtain close in front of you, and presently it will be raised, and you will see something you never saw before. How well, on the whole, the secret has been kept, though from time to time little bits of information, little scraps of dialogue, little descriptions of scenery have leaked out. Enthrallingly interesting; one wonders how they will come into the great new drama."

"You don't mean the sort of thing that mediums tell me?" I asked.

"Of course I don't. I hate the sloshy—really there's no other word for it, and why should there be, since that word fits so admirably—the sloshy utterances of the ordinary high-class, beyond-suspicion medium at half a guinea a sitting, who asks if there's anybody present who once knew a Charles, or if not Charles, Thomas or William. Naturally somebody has known a Charles, Thomas or William who has passed over, and is the son, brother, father or cousin of a lady in black. So when she claims Thomas, he tells her that he is very busy and happy, helping people. . . . O Lord, what rot! I went to one such séance a month ago, just before I was taken ill, and the medium said that Margaret wanted to get into touch with somebody. Two of us claimed Margaret, but Margaret chose me and said she was the spirit of my wife. Wife, you know! You must allow that this was a very unfortunate shot. When I said that I was unmarried, Margaret said that she was my mother, whose name was Charlotte. Oh dear, oh dear! Well, I shall go to bed with joy, bringing your spooks with me. . . ."

"Sheaves," said I.

"Yes, but aren't they the sheaves? Isn't one's gleaning of sheaves in this world what they call spooks? That is, the knowledge of what one takes across?"

"I don't understand one word," said I.

"But you must understand. All the knowledge—worth anything—which you or I have collected here, is the beginning of the other life. We toil and moil, and make our gleanings and our harvestings, and all our decent efforts help us to realize what the real harvest is. Surely we shall take with us exactly that which we have reaped. . . ."

After he had gone to bed I sat trying to correct the errors of a typist, but still between me and the pages there dwelt that haunting sense of all that we did here being only the grist of what was to come. Our achievements were rewarded, so he seemed to say, by a glimpse. And those glimpses—so I tried to follow him—were the hints that had leaked out of the drama for which the curtain was twitching. Was that it?

RODERICK came down to breakfast next morning, superlatively happy.

"I didn't read a single line of your stories," he said. "When I got into my bedroom I was so immeasurably content that I couldn't risk getting interested in anything else. I lay awake a long time, pinching myself in order to prolong my sheer happiness, but the flesh was weak, and at last, from sheer happiness, I slept and probably snored. Did you hear me? I hope not. And then sheer happiness dictated my dreams, though I don't know what they were, and the moment I was called I got up, because. . . . Because I didn't want to miss anything. Now, to be practical again, what are you doing this morning?"

"I was intending to play golf," I said, "unless—"

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"There isn't an 'unless,' if you mean me. My plan made itself for me, and I intend —this is my plan—to drive out with you, and sit in the hollow by the fourth tee, and read your stories there. There's a great southwesterly wind, like a celestial house-maid, scouring the skies, and I shall be completely sheltered there, and in the intervals of my reading, I shall pleasantly observe the unsuccessful efforts of the golfers to carry the big bunker. I can't personally play golf any more, but I shall enjoy seeing other people attempting to do it."

"And no prowling or purring?" I asked.

"Not this morning. That's all right: it's there. It's so much all right that I want to be active in other directions. Sitting in a windless hollow is about the range of my activities. I say that for fear that you should."

I found a match when we arrived at the clubhouse, and Roderick strolled away to the goal of his observations. Half an hour afterwards I found him watching with criminally ecstatic joy the soaring drives that, in the teeth of the great wind, were arrested and blown back into the unholiest bunker in all the world or the low clever balls that never rose to the height of the shored-up cliff of sand. The couple in front of my partner and me were sarcastic dogs, and bade us wait only till they had delved themselves over the ridge, and then we might follow as soon as we chose. After violent deeds in the bunker they climbed over the big dune, thirty yards beyond which lay the green on which they would now be putting.

As soon as they had disappeared, Roderick snatched my driver from my hand.

"I can't bear it," he said. "I must hit a ball again. Tee it low, caddie. . . . No, no tee at all."

He hit a superb shot, just high enough to carry the ridge, and not so high that it caught the opposing wind and was stopped towards the end of its flight. He gave a loud croak of laughter.

"That'll teach them not to insult my friend," he said. "It must have been pitched right among their careful puttings. And now I shall go and read his ghost-stories."

I have recorded this athletic incident because better than any analysis of his attitude towards life and death it conveys just what that attitude was. He knew perfectly well that any swift exertion might be fatal to him, but he wanted to hit a golf ball again as sweetly and as hard as it could be hit. He had done it: he had scored off death. And as I went on my way I felt perfectly confident that if, with that brisk free effort, he had fallen dead on the tee, he would have thought it well worth while, provided only that he had made that irreproachable shot.

THE stories which Roderick had taken to read were designed to be of an uncomfortable type: one concerned a vampire, one an elemental, the third the reincarnation of a certain execrable personage, and as we sat in the garden-room after tea, he with these pages on his knees, I had the pleasure of seeing him give hasty glances round, as he read, as if to assure himself that there was nothing unusual in the dimmer corners of the room. . . . I liked that; he was doing as I intended that a reader should.

Before long he came to the last page.

"And are you intending to make a book of them?" he asked. "What are the other stories like?"

"Worse," said I, with the complacency of the horror-monger.

"Then—did you ask for criticism? I shall give it in any case—you will make a book that not only is inartistic, all shadows and no light, but a false book. Fiction can be false, you know, inherently false. You play godfather to your stories, you see: you tell them in the first person, those at least that I have read, and that, though it need not be supposed that those experiences were actually yours, yet gives a sort of guarantee that you believe the borderland of which you write to be entirely terrible. But it isn't: there are probably terrors there—I think for instance that I believe in elemental spirits, of some ghastly kind—but I am sure that I believe that the borderland, for the most part, is almost inconceivably delightful. I've got the best of reasons for believing that."

"I'm willing to be convinced," said I.

Again, as he looked at the fire, his eye sparkled, not with the reflected flame, but with the brightness of some interior vision.

"Well, there's an hour yet before dinner," he said, "and my story won't take half of that. It's about my previous experience of this house; what I saw, in fact, in the room which I now occupy. It was because of that, naturally, that I wanted the same room again. Here goes, then.

"For the twenty years of Margaret's married life," he said, "I never saw her except quite accidentally and casually. Cas-

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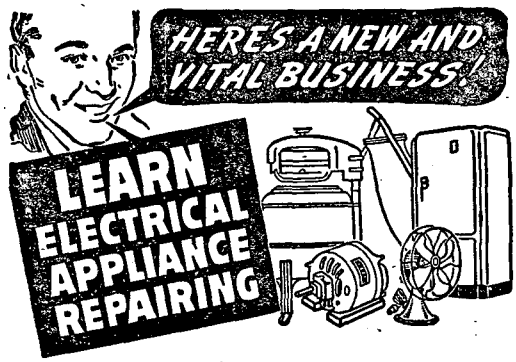

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ually, like that, I had seen her at theatres and what not with her two boys whom thus I knew by sight. But I had never spoken to either of them, nor, after her marriage, to their mother. I knew, as all the world knew, that she had a terrible life, but circumstances being what they were, I could not bring myself to her notice, the more so because she made no sign or gesture of wanting me. But I am sure that no day passed on which I did not long to be able to show her that my love and sympathy were hers.

"I heard, of course, of the death of her sons. They were both killed in France within a few days of each other; one was eighteen, the other nineteen. I wrote to her then formally, so long had we been strangers, and she answered formally. After that, she took this house, where she lived alone. A year later, I was told that she had now for some months been suffering from a malignant and disfiguring disease.

"I was in London, strolling down Piccadilly when my companion mentioned it, and I at once became aware that I must go to see her, not tomorrow or soon, but now.

"A FEW hours later I was at your door here, asked to see her, and was told that she was desperately ill and could see nobody. But I got her maid to take the message that I was here, and presently her nurse came down to tell me that she would see me. I should find Margaret, she said, wearing a veil so as to conceal from me the dreadful ravages which the disease had inflicted on her face, and the scars of the two operations which she had undergone. Very likely she would not speak to me, for she had great difficulty in speaking at all, and in any case I was not to stay for more than a few minutes. Probably she could not live many hours: I had only just come in time. And at that moment I wished I had done anything rather than come here, for though instinct had driven me here, yet instinct now recoiled with unspeakable horror. The flesh wars against the spirit, you know, and under its stress I now suggested that it was better perhaps that I should not see her. . . . . But the nurse merely said again that Margaret wished to see me.

"I went in alone; Margaret was propped up in bed with pillows, so that she sat nearly upright, and over her head was a dark veil through which I could see noth-

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ing whatever. Her right hand lay on the coverlet, and as I seated myself by her bedside, where the nurse had put a chair for me, Margaret advanced her hand towards me, shyly, hesitatingly.

He paused, his face beaming and radiant with the light of that memory.

"I am speaking of things unspeakable," he said. "I can no more convey to you all that meant than by a mere enumeration of colours can I steep your soul in the feeling of a sunset. . . . So there I sat, with her hand covered and clasped in mine. I had been told that very likely she would not speak, and for myself there was no word which would not be dross in the gold of that silence. And then from behind her veil there came a whisper.

"'I couldn't die without seeing you,' she said. 'I was sure you would come. I've one thing to say to you. I loved you, and I tried to choke my love. And for years, my dear, I have been reaping the harvest of what I did. I tried to kill love, but it was so much stronger than I. And now the harvest is gathered. I have suffered cruelly, you know, but I bless every pang of it. I needed it all. . . .'

"Only a few minutes before, I had quaked at the thought of seeing her. But now I could not suffer that the veil should cover her face.

"'Put up your veil, darling,' I said. 'I must see you.'

"'No, no,' she whispered. 'I should horrify you. I am terrible.'

"'You can't be terrible to me,' I said. 'I am going to lift it.'

"I raised her veil. And what did I see? I might have known, I think; I might have guessed that at this moment, supreme and perfect, I should see with vision.

"There was no scar or ravage of disease or disfigurement there. She was far lovelier than she had ever been, and on her face there shone the dawn of the everlasting day. She had shed all that was perishable and subject to decay, and her immortal spirit was manifested to me, purged and punished if you will, but humble and holy. There was granted to my frail mortal sight the power of seeing truly, it was permitted to me to be with her beyond the bounds of mortality. . . .

"And then, even as I was lost in an amazement of love and wonder, I saw we were not alone in the room. Two boys, whom I recognized, were standing at the other side of the bed, looking at her. It

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seemed utterly natural that they should be there.

"'We've been allowed to come to you, mother darling,' said one. 'Get up.'

"She turned her face to them.

"'Ah, my dears,' she said. 'How lovely of you. But just one moment.'

"She bent over towards me and kissed me.

"'Thank you for coming, Roderick,' she said. "Good-bye, just for a little while.'

"At that my power of sight—my power of true sight—failed. Her head fell back on the pillows and turned over on one side. For one second, before I let the veil drop over it again, I had a glimpse of her face, marred and cruelly mutilated. I saw that, I say, but never then nor afterwards could I remember it. It was like a terrible dream, which utterly fades on the awaking. Then her hand, which had been clasping mine, in that moment of her farewell slackened its hold, and dropped on to the bed. She had just moved away, somewhere out of sight, with her two boys to look after her."

He paused.

"That's all," he said. "And do you wonder that I chose that room? How I hope that she will come for me."

MY ROOM was next to Roderick's, the head of his bed being just opposite the head of mine on the other side of the wall. That night I had undressed, lain down, and had just put out my light, when I heard a sharp tap above me. I thought it was some fortuitous noise, as of a picture swinging in a draught, but the moment after it was repeated, and it struck me that it was perhaps a summons from Roderick who wanted something. Still quite unalarmed, I got out of bed, and, candle in hand, went to his door. I knocked, but receiving no answer, opened it an inch or two.

"Did you want anything?" I asked, and, again receiving no answer, I went in.

His lights were burning, and he was sitting up in bed. He did not appear to see me or be conscious of my presence, and his eyes were fixed on some point a few feet away in front of him. His mouth smiled, and in his eyes was just such a joy as I had seen there when he told me his story. Then, leaning on his arm, he moved as if to rise.

"Oh, Margaret, my dear. . . ."

He drew a couple of short breaths, and fell back.

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

(Continued from page 115)

Portfolio is exceptional. Is the "New Lawrence Portfolio" advertised in the Dec. issue the same as the one advertised in the March issue?

Thanks for publishing my letter in the Dec. issue. The P.S.F.S., of which I am the president, has got two new members already through F.F.M.

I thought I had read all of H. Rider Haggard's works, until I read his exceptional "The Ancient Allan." I think it's his best.

I'm buying up all the back numbers of F.F.M. that I've missed. After reading them, I'm having them bound into books. Four copies of F.F.M., or one year's issues, will just make a book of the right size.

ALBERT A. PEPPER,
Pres. Phila. Science Fiction Society.

5652 Larchwood Ave.,
Phila., 43, Pa.

Editor's Note: The new Lawrence Portfolio is the first of this artist's illustrations from F.F.M. to be reproduced. We shall have a second selection.

YEAR'S RATING

As a recent measure of economy, I cut my purchase of fiction magazines to two titles. Needless to add, F.F.M. was one of the two. It is unique in the fantasy field.

I first became acquainted with your magazine when I purchased a copy of the December, 1944, issue, which was excellent. I hope to see more stories by Hyne and Dunsany.

I have rated the stories of the past year.

Novels: 1. The Boats of the Glen Carrig—very good; 2. The Ancient Allan—very good; 3. Phra the Phoenician—very good; 4. The Machine Stops—good; 5. Even A Worm—fair.

Short Stories: 1. Before I Wake—good; 2. The Hashish Eater—good; 3. Heaven Only Knows—fair.

As you can see, I am heartily in favor of more tales by Hodgson, Haggard and Arnold. I would also like to add my voice to those asking for the works of Stapledon and Le Fanu. I would like to see new work by Clark Ashton Smith, C. L. Moore, Donald Wandrei, Fritz Leiber, Jr., A. E. Van Vogt and Don A. Stuart.

As an A. Merritt admirer, I have another suggestion to add to the many you have already received. Once a year, why not print a novel (together wtih a short, perhaps) by Merritt, and sell it in conjunction with F.F.M. subscriptions, just as you do now with your portfolios? It need not replace the portfolios, necessarily. It could be something additional. Many readers would probably buy both and those who do not now buy the artwork would probably buy the Merrittales. Where you have so many requests, can there be any doubt but what you would sell out? In conclusion, I must add that your illustrators are unusually good. The "Phra" cover deserves a prize.

J. HERALD.

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WANTS MORE HAGGARD YARNS

I really enjoy The Readers' Viewpoint in F.F.M. magazine. I know many other readers do too. So few of us take time to write in and compliment the Editor on a good all around magazine.

I wish to add my vote to the group of fans rooting for Haggard. Hope to see his best ones in your F.F.M. I mean "She" and "Ayesha."

I never miss an issue of F.F.M. I am first on the reserve list at the drugstore. Keep up the good work.

K. M. CARLSON.

1028 Third Ave., South,
Moorhead, Minn.

CAN YOU HELP?

This is the first fan letter I have written. I have a purpose, however. I have read four issues of F.F.M. (beginning Sept. '44) and I'm very anxious to obtain back issues. I am a sincere fantasy fan, though I don't care for long drawn out technical explanations. They bore me, as I don't understand all of them. It is not a sign of ignorance either. I have a very vivid imagination and would like very much to become a fantasy writer, but if I were a failure, I would never live it down at home.

If there is any fan who has some back issue mags. they would consider disposing of, please get in touch with me. I would especially like Merritt, Lovecraft, Haggard and Burroughs. If it is possible I would like to get Burroughs' "Seven Worlds to Conquer."

As I live in the country, a newsstand is a dream. I have no end of trouble to obtain my favorite mags. I am also the wife of an ex-soldier, so money is limited. So far I've been unable to obtain any back numbers of anything. Can someone help a gal in distress?

Frantic Fan,
MRS. ERNEST TAYLOR.

P. O. Box 111
Arapahoe, No. Car.

"PHRA" SATISFACTORY

I write you to give tidings of your story, "Phra the Phoenician." It wasn't a bad tale. Arnold had a good subject, and he certainly wrote around it well. Are you going to print any other stories by him? If so, what are they?

"The Boats of Glen Carrig" far exceeded my expectations. You ought to print more by Hodgson.

Your "Phra" cover was good—on the symbolic side. The inside drawings were well done too, especially the first one.

C. H. MATHEWS.

Route 2,
Alpena, Mich.

Editor's Note: No other Arnold tales suitable for F.F.M. have so far come to our attention.

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

CONGRATULATIONS

I enclose a year's subscription for *Famous Fantastic Mysteries Magazine* and one Portfolio of illustrations by Lawrence. He is truly a wonderful artist, and I am glad you are publishing a set of his drawings. By the way: My requests will probably not carry much weight, but I would like to see the following stories appear in F.F.M., as I find them unobtainable anywhere: "When Worlds Collide" and "After Worlds Collide," by Balmer and Wylie; Doyle's "Lost World,"—"War of the Worlds" and "Time Machine," by Wells; and "Devil's Highway," by H. B. Wright and John Lebar. I like your magazine very much; it is the only one published today which, in my estimation, prints really good stories which are well-illustrated. It is a treasury for those who like to collect stories that are scarce and contain that element of the weird, strange, or fantastic which is so appealing to most of us.

JACK EVANS.

Wallowa, Oregon

"ISHTAR" BOOK WANTED

I am very interested in obtaining a copy of Merritt's "Ship Of Ishtar" and am turning to you or some fellow-readers for help. Does anyone have a copy to sell or can someone advise me how to get hold of one?

R. LOUCKS.

232-132 St.,
Rockaway Beach, N. Y.

F.F.M. THE BEST

I have the following five E.R.B. books for readers who are interested: "Warlord of Mars," "Gods of Mars," "Mastermind of Mars," "Princess of Wars," "At the Earth's Core."

I also have the Caxton Edition of Bulwer Lytton's "Haunted House" and Calderon's "The Courtier and the Coming Race" (all in one book) and "Colonel Quaritch" by Haggard.

These books are about fifty years old and in good condition.

Your mag. is the best in the fantastic field. I am selling or trading all my other science fiction and fantastic mags, but intend to keep F.F.M. Anyone having extra 1940 or 1939 issues please write to me.

MRS. EARL BECKER.

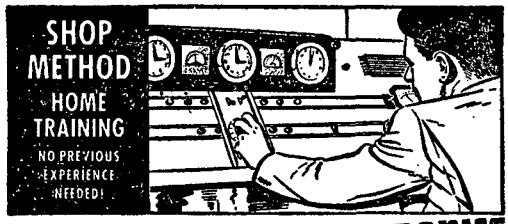
11 No. German St.,
Mayville, Wisc.

BACK ISSUE NEWS

I have in my possession certain old copies of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and *Fantastic Novels*—such as "Dwellers in the Mirage," "The Metal Monster," J. U. Giesy's "The Mouthpiece of Zitu" and Ralph Milne Farley's "The Golden City"—which, though they are dear to me, I might be induced to part with.

ARTHUR COX.

485½ Hartford Ave.,
Los Angeles, Calif.



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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

ADVICE

I was disappointed with "Th Machine Stops." "Before I Wake" was well written, but it has no place in F.F.M. It was, to coin a word, a *Cosmopolitan*-ish story. (Readers of Cosmopolitan fantasy will realize what I mean.)

I was glad to see you print Machen's "Novel of the White Powder." You must certainly give us the other fantasy from "The Three Impostors," "The Novel of the Black Seal," and some of the tales from "The House of Souls" ("The Shining Pyramid" and "The White People") "The Red Hand" is too long for a short story and too short for a novel, but perhaps you can publish it anyway. Don't publish "The Great God Pan" just yet, for it is currently available.

I think Dunsany is one of the best Fantasy writers of today, but you haven't begun to draw on him. How about something from "Time and the Gods" or "The Book of Wonder"? Most of Dunsany's novels are too fairy-tale-like, but he did write one that I liked a great deal, and I think others will too. I'm speaking of "The Blessing of Pan," the pleasant story of a small English town sinking back into the ways of Nature.

If you are going to publish any more prehistorics I would like to suggest my favorite "In the Morning of Time" by Roberts.

Other stories I would like to see in F.F.M. are: "The Dream Quest of the Unknown Kadath" by H. P. Lovecraft, and more Blackwood. More Taine and Hodgson, whatever fantasies are left in "The King in Yellow," poetry and new stories by C. A. Smith, anything by John Collier, and perhaps some ERB stories (I wish some of these fans who claim Burroughs' books are easy to get would tell me where to get them).

In closing let me beg any fan who has the issue containing Taine's "The Iron Star" to trade, to please contact me. I would also be delighted to hear from anyone having spare back copies of F.F.M. (other than 1944 and 1945's) and F.N.

ERIC HOLMES
4009 BLACK POINT ROAD,
HONOLULU T. H.

THE NAVY REPORTS

Enclosed find check, and send me a Lawrence Portfolio, also a subscription to F.F.M. "The Machine Stops" and "Before I Wake," were good. Smith's story in my opinion is better than John Taine's stories, although they seem to revolve around the same themes. In your December issue "The Lost Continent" was really a beautiful story. In the future I would like to see more stories by Hodgson, some by E. F. Benson and English books which are hard to obtain over here.

CLAUDE HELD, S 2/c..

SHE DISCOVERS F.F.M.

I picked up the first F.F.M. issue to fall into my hands, yesterday. I couldn't believe my

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eyes! What, no girls pinned to pillars by a knife through their colorfully glamorous anatomy?

I used to read the old *All-Story*, also the *Argosy*, before they combined. Back when they had "The Moon Pool", "Girl of the Golden Atom", "People of the Abyss" etc. Back in the days of the Semi-Dual stories, and Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Then several years elapsed and all the old ones seemed to have vanished—so far as I could discover, and the new ones were slimy with sex.

And now, I find *this*. And also find it has been in existence several years! Where have I been all this time!

I am writing today to some who offer back numbers. I am more than happy to realize that I am going to be able to enjoy good, well-written stories of fantasy again. I only wish your magazine was a weekly one.

MRS. N. DE HART.

RT. 1
ESTACADA, OREGON

HODGSON FAN

Enclosed is check for year's subscription to F.F.M. "The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*" was interesting, well-written, and really something new in the fantastic field of our day. The drawings were excellent. I have some old mags if someone would like to exchange by mail. Just drop me a line.

M. DOMINICK.

P. O. Box 175,
NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.

SATISFIED READER

I have just read the June F.F.M. and I think "The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*" is one of the best weird stories I have ever read. How about more of the same type? Try to get a story by Lovecraft that hasn't been printed in a magazine.

"Even a Worm" was good also.

1945 will have been your best year.

CECIL PURDY.

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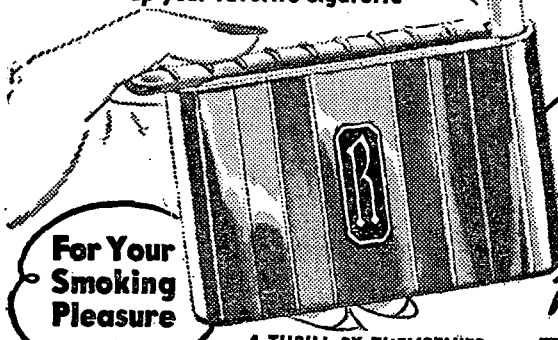

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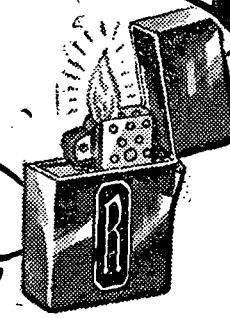

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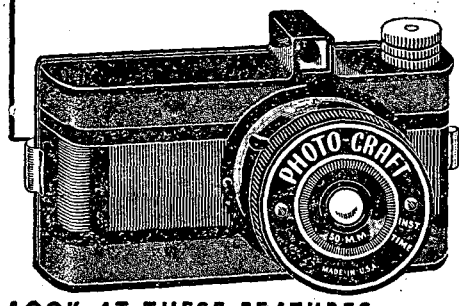

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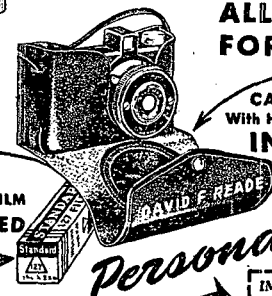

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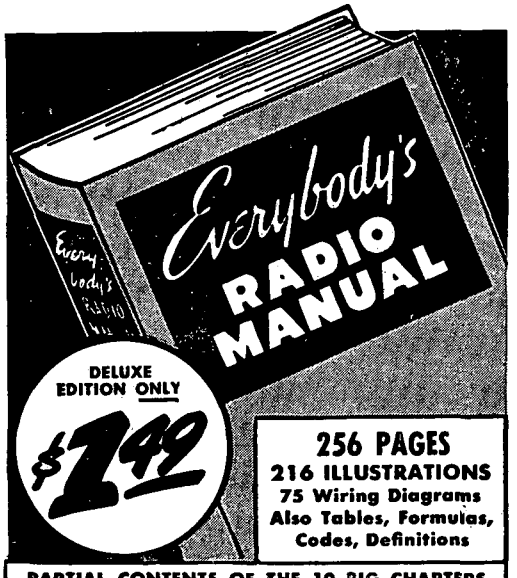

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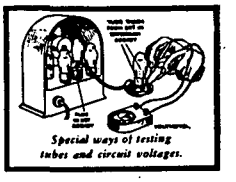
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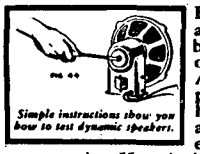
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